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THE NEW YORKER

Oct. 18 & 25, 1999

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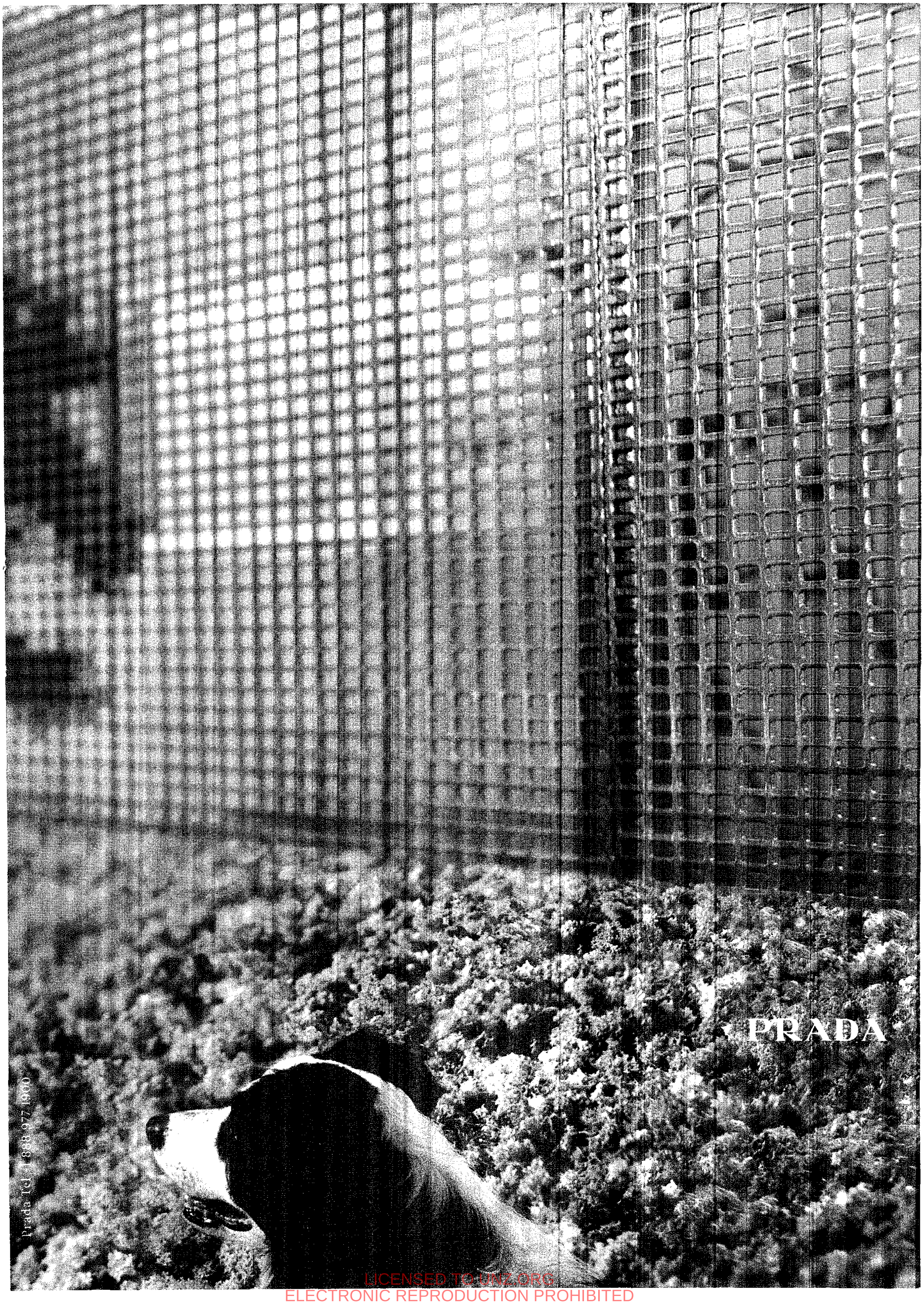
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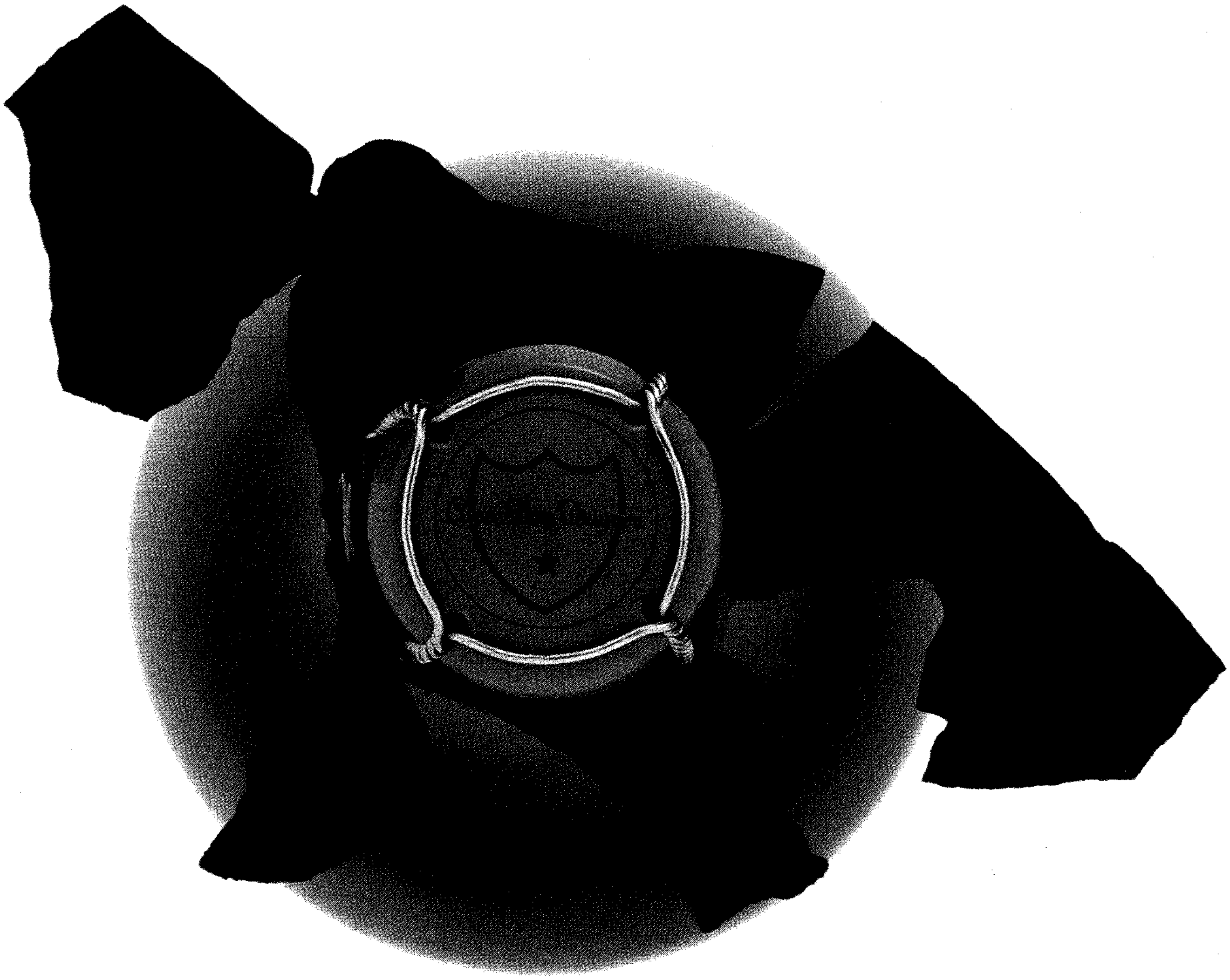

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THE NEXT GENERATION

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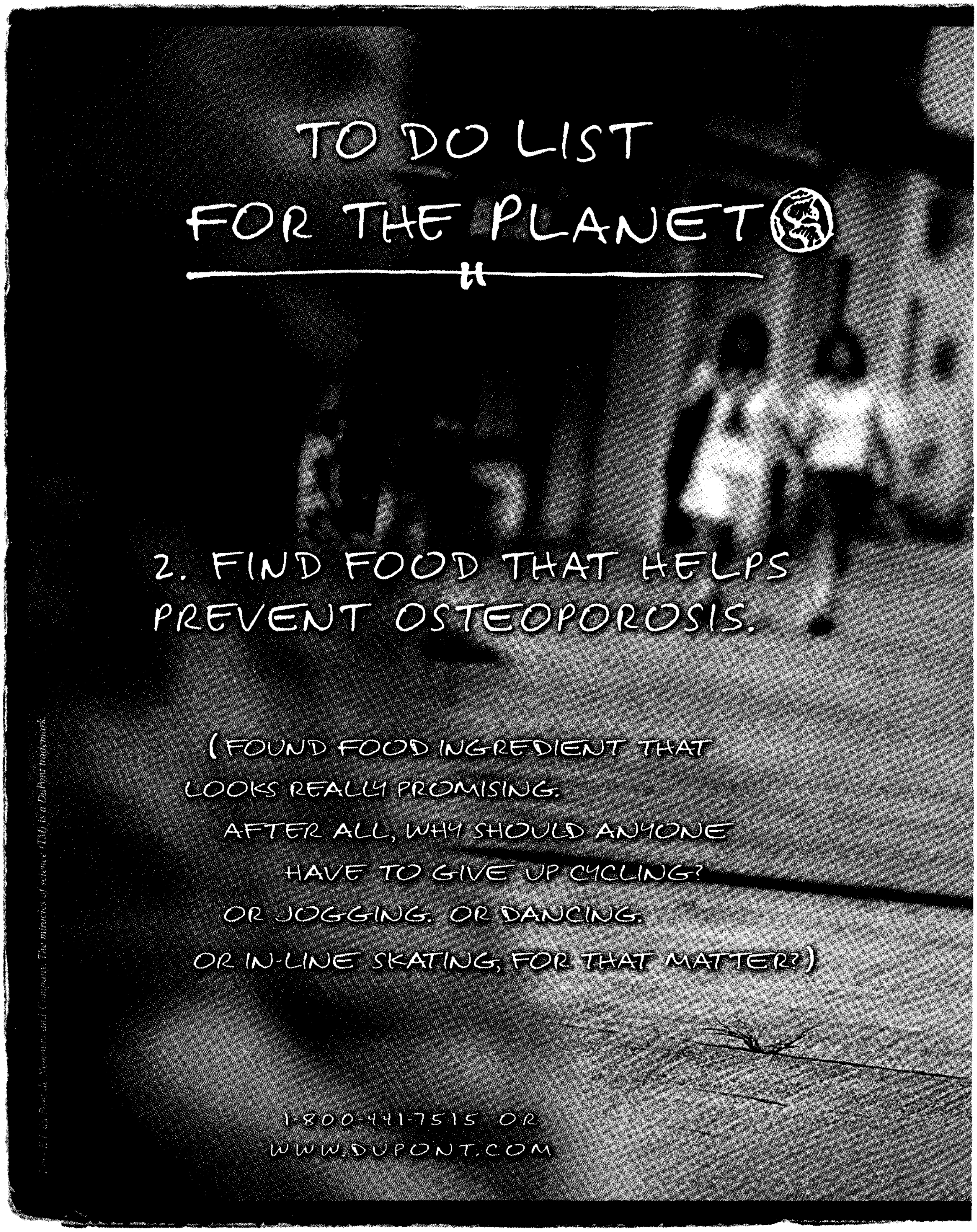

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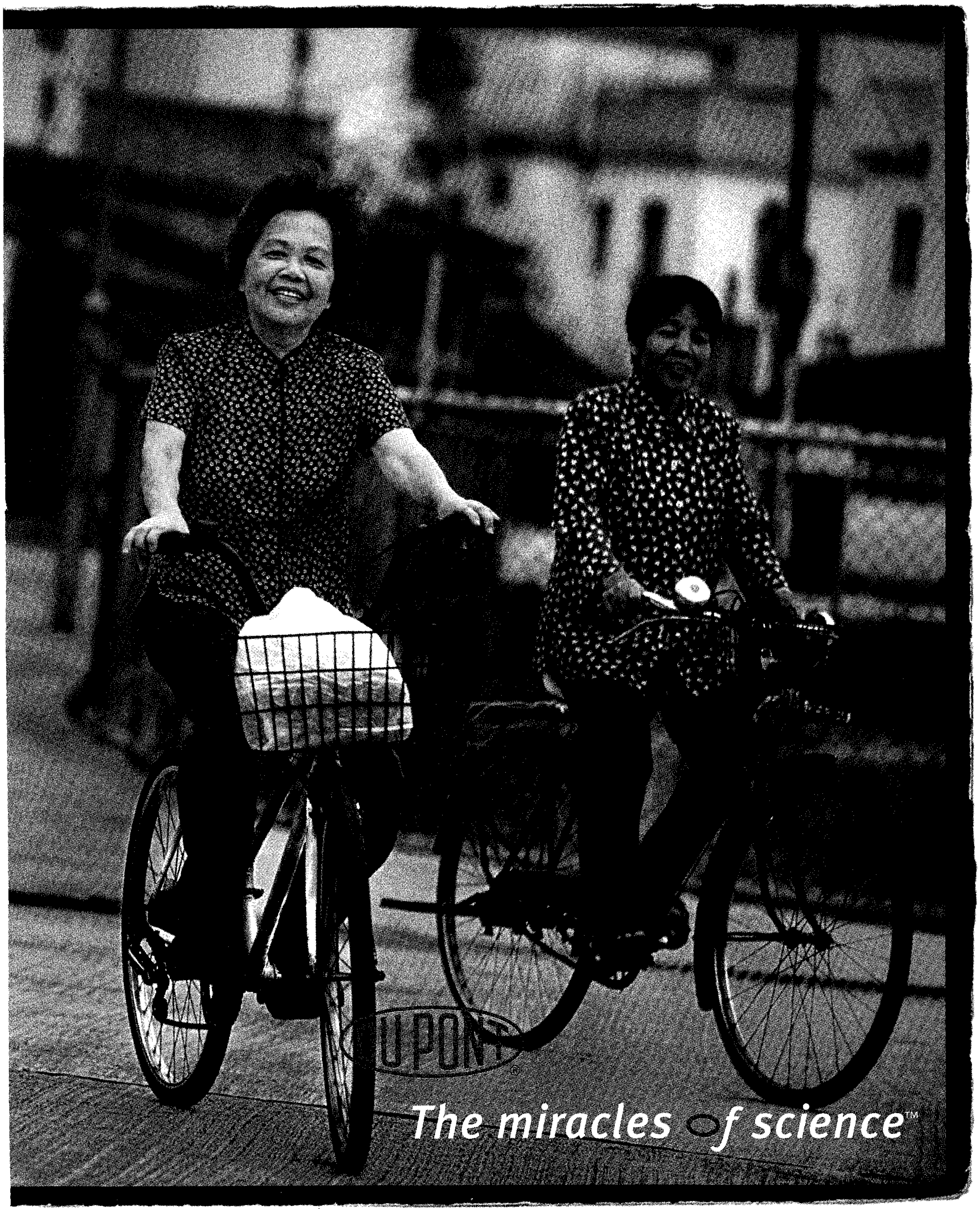
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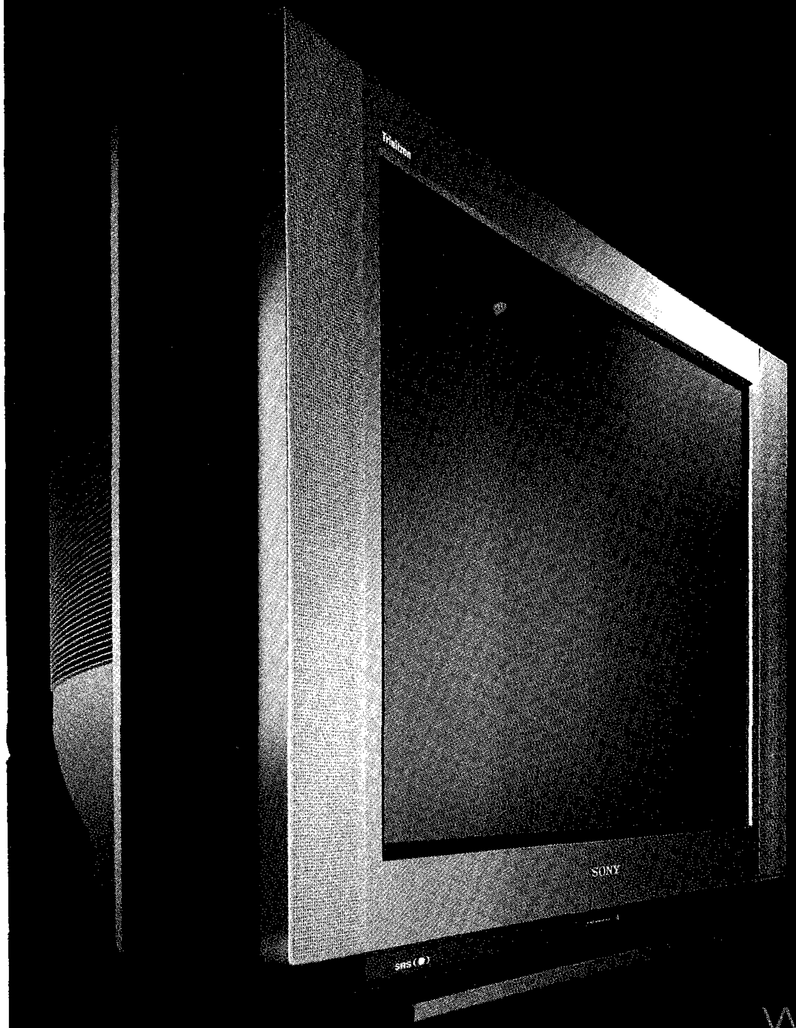

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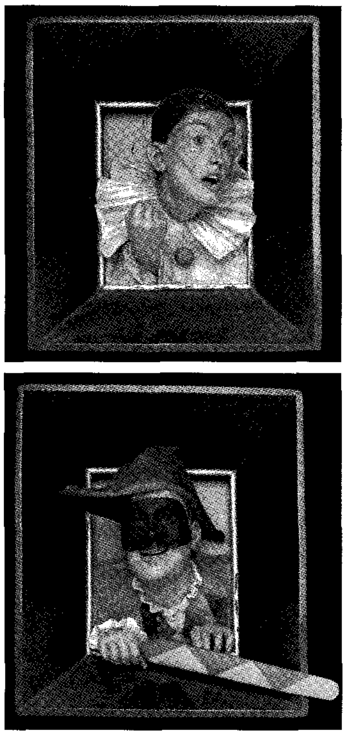

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CONTRIBUTORS

DAVE EGGERS ("The Orphans Are Coming!," p. 218) is the editor of *McSweeney's*. His book, "A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius," will be published in February.

REBECCA MEAD ("Sophie's World," p. 184) has been a staff writer for this magazine since 1997.

MARTIN SCHOELLER (Photographs, pp. 135, 193, 200, 202, 212, 240, 250), is working on a project documenting the Newark Police Department.

LARISSA MACFARQUHAR ("The Connector," p. 110) is a staff writer for *The New Yorker.*

MELANIE THERNSTROM ("The Craft," p. 136) has written two nonfiction books, "The Dead Girl" and "Halfway Heaven: Diary of a Harvard Murder."

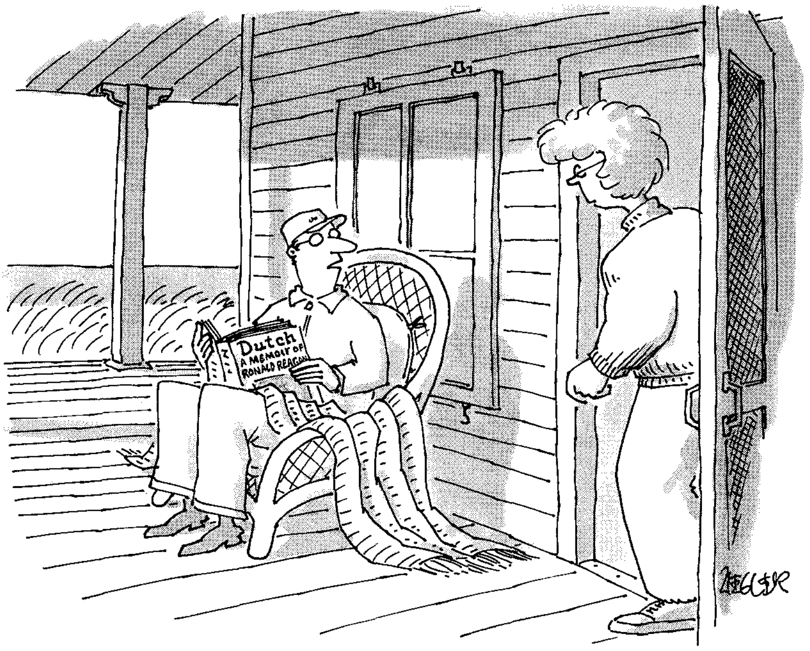
MEGHAN DAUM ("My Misspent Youth," p. 162) is a freelance writer living in Lincoln, Nebraska. Her work is included in "The KGB Bar Reader."

DAVID SAMUELS ("Hip-Hop High," p. 196) is at work on his first novel.

RICHARD PRESTON ("West Nile Mystery," p. 90), the author of "The Hot Zone," about the Ebola virus, has been a contributor to *The New Yorker* since 1986.

NICHOLAS LEMANN ("The Kids in the Conference Room," p. 208), a staff writer, has a new book, "The Big Test: The Secret History of the American Meritocracy," published this month.

RON REAGAN (The Talk of the Town, p. 86) is a writer and television producer living in Seattle, Washington. ♦



"Not a single mention of how 'Bedtime for Bonzo' fits into the big picture."

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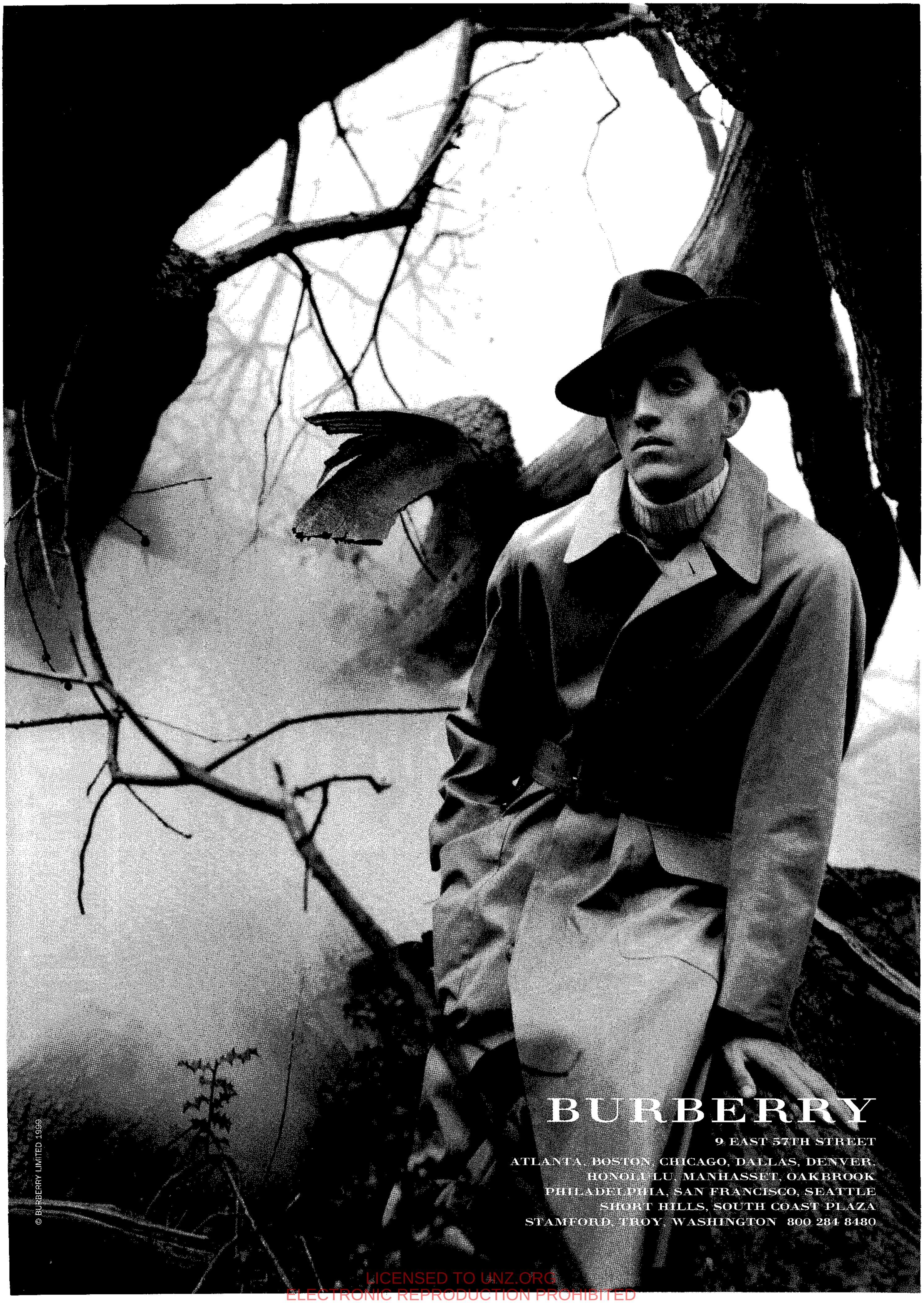

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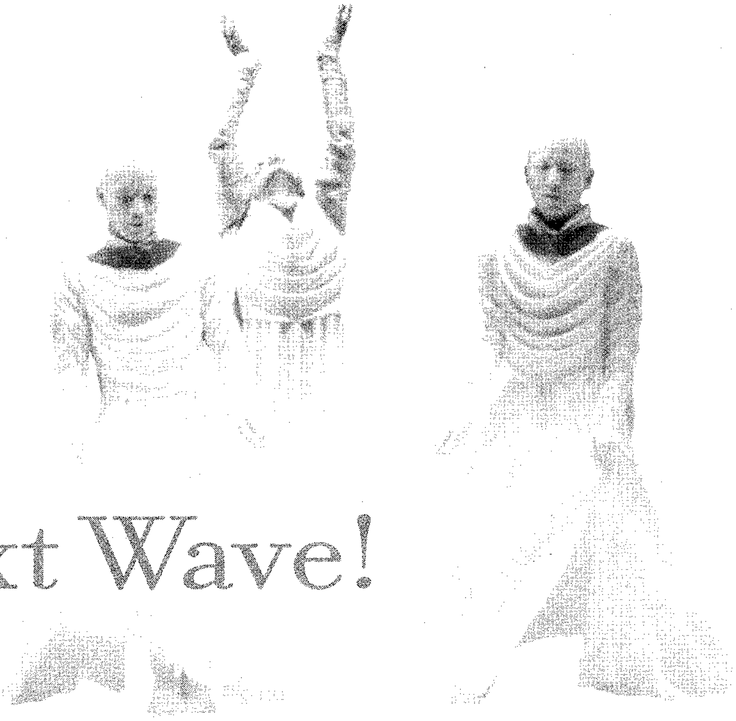
Take a new look...
[illegible] Roberto Fortuna; N'Dea Davenport [illegible]



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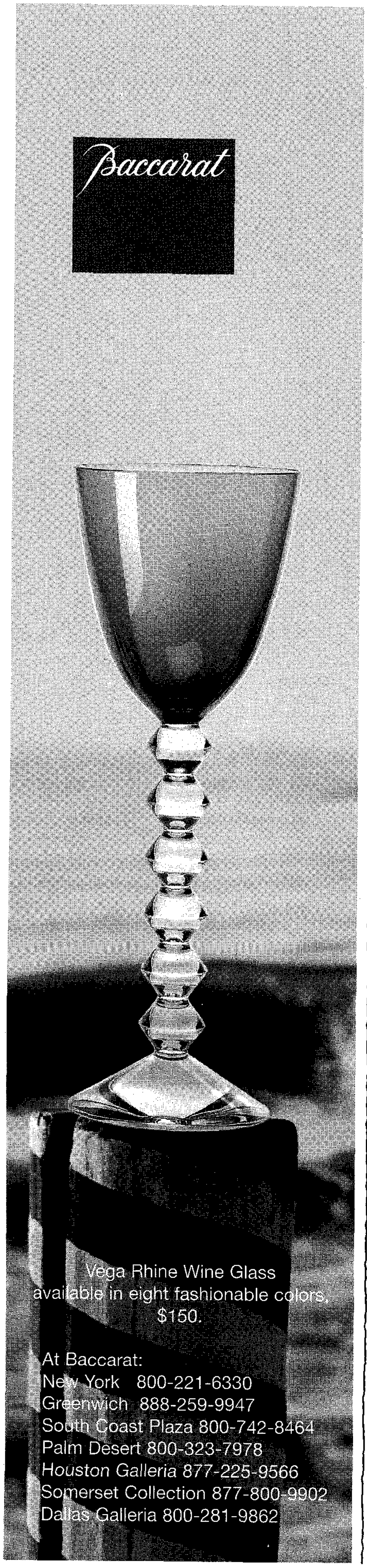
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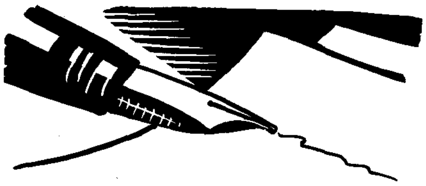

HANDS OFF HARRY!

As an eleven-year-old reader, I felt outraged by the Harry Potter article (Talk of the Town, September 20th). I think it's absurd how the editor Arthur Levine changed the words so that "an American kid reading the book would have the same literary experience that a British kid would have." I have read both the British and the American versions of the books, and frankly the British versions are better. I am quite sure that any eleven-year-old could figure out what a timetable is, or that "pudding" is dessert and "jelly" is quite like Jell-O. None of the vocabulary in the book was "incomprehensible or unnecessarily distracting." In fact, they were quite light reads. You do not get the full, authentic experience of Harry Potter when "spanking good" and "crooked" replace "cracking" and "wonky" (which happens to be a personal favorite word of mine). In the future, Mr. Levine might keep in mind that kids have very large imaginations, and can usually figure out without too much difficulty what words mean from their context. There's no need for imitation slang.

WHITAKER E. COHEN
Owings Mills, Md.

BROWBEATING

In "Nobrow Culture" (September 20th) John Seabrook lumps everything cultural under the rubric of "thing"—tomatoes, coffee tables, works of art are all things to be acquired, to bestow status, to be compared with other things on the most basic level. But reducing culture to price tags obscures the true difference between mass and élite culture: mass culture takes no time, while élite culture takes time and demands understanding. To use Seabrook's example of Mozart: one can appreciate Mozart as elevator music with no work at all (the man did write lovely melodies), but to fall deeply in love with Mozart's music requires taking the time to understand something of the classical tradition, to read a bit of musical exegesis on the man and his works, and, most important, to listen with care and attention. This effort has nothing to do with consuming and, by its very nature, goes against the instant-gratification culture of the nineties.

The delicious irony here, of course, is that a deep enjoyment of Mozart costs incredibly little (CDs and music books are available in most libraries) and is theoretically available to anyone. So élite culture has come within easy reach of the masses, while the masses spend themselves into bankruptcy buying icons of mass culture.

BONNIE SLOANE
Los Angeles, Calif.

Ads have been telling us lately that not only is greed good, it's art. Mr. Seabrook seems to believe, perhaps with regret, that we have no choice but to accept this sad philosophy. The collapse of the old cultural hierarchies, in his view, has left a vacuum that only commerce can fill. Although I take a genuine, sadistic pleasure in imagining the status seeker's agony when faced with the purchase of a two-hundred-dollar T-shirt, I don't understand how the shopping habits of the upper-middle class are supposed to have redefined the relationship between art and commerce. Art has always been a commodity, the means of the artist's survival. What separates art from commerce is whether it is about something more than selling itself. That distinction, ambiguous as it may be, is still very real. It may be true that aesthetic "taste" bears the taint of privilege, and that it is undermined by multicultural, class-conscious perspectives. Fine—but what has that got to do with dithering over the purchase of T-shirts and coffee tables?

CHRIS WOOD
New York City

•

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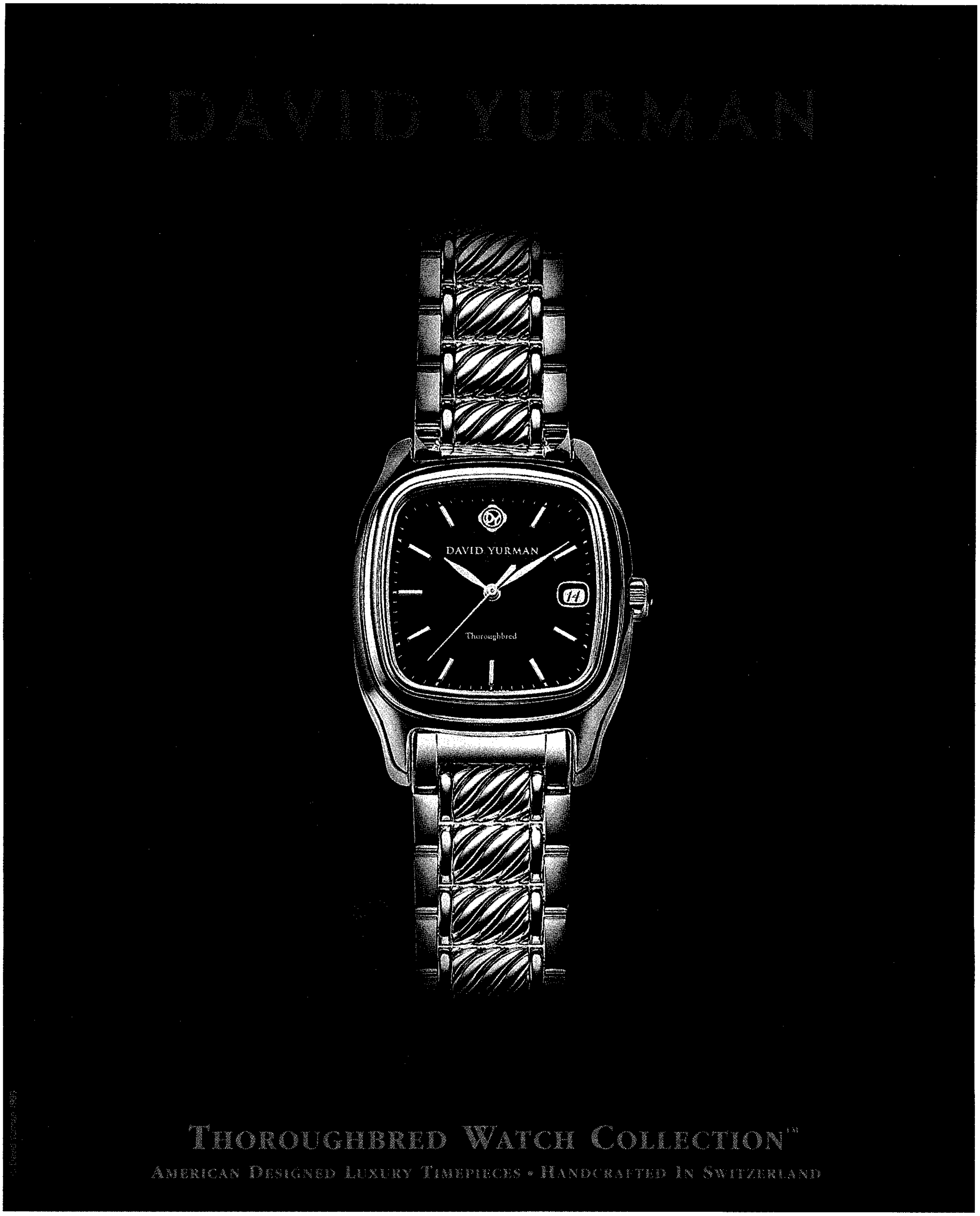
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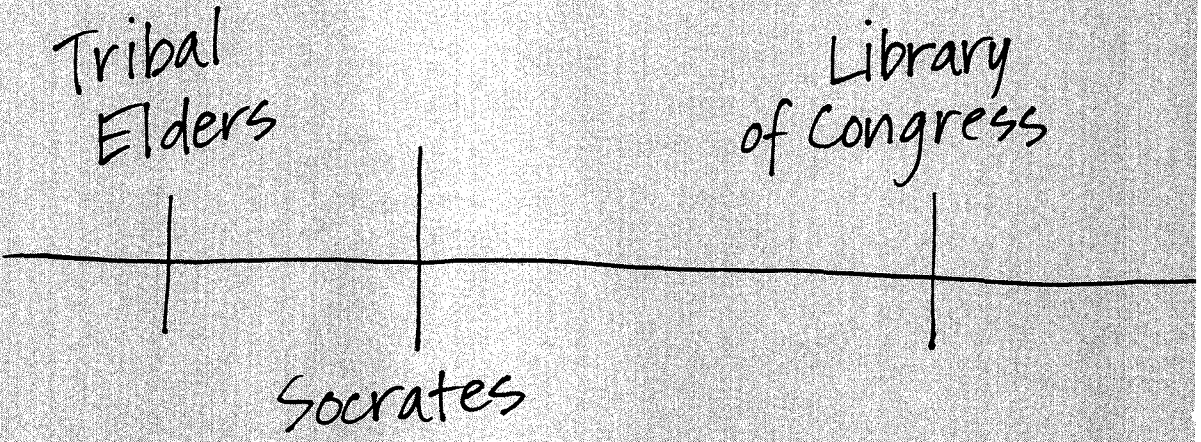
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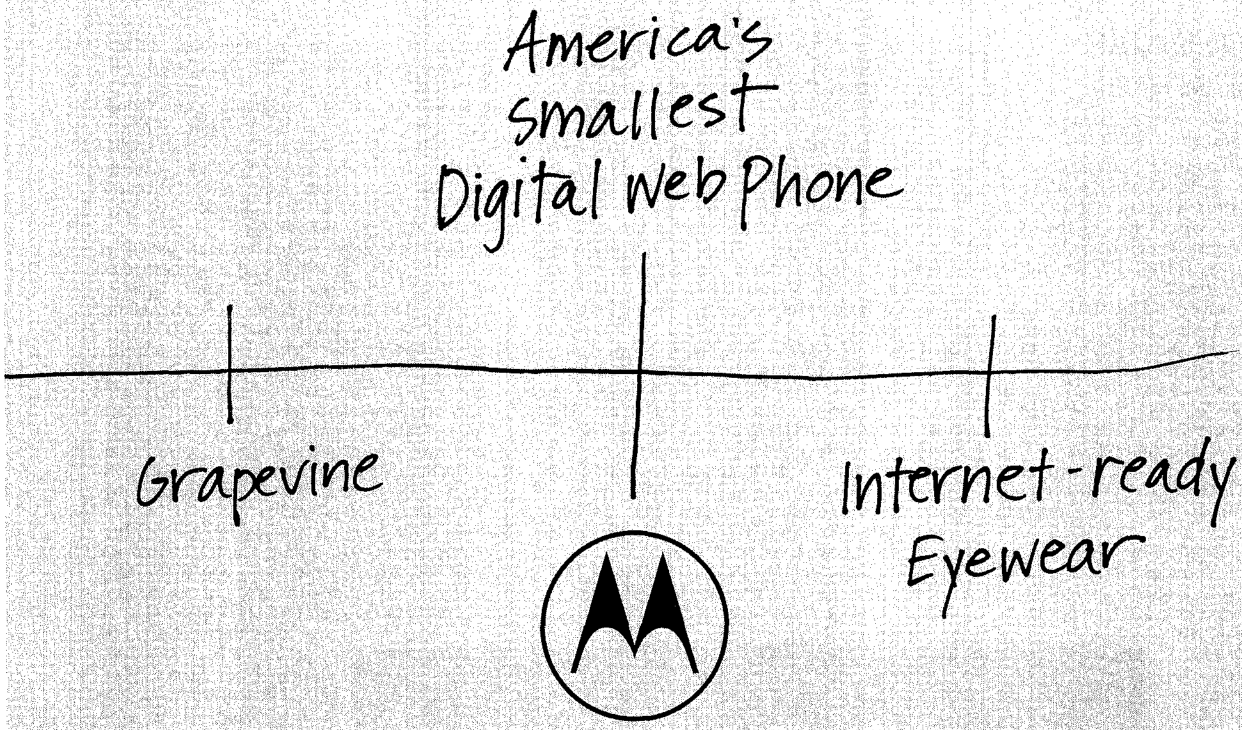
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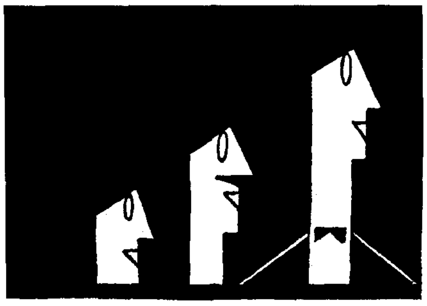

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

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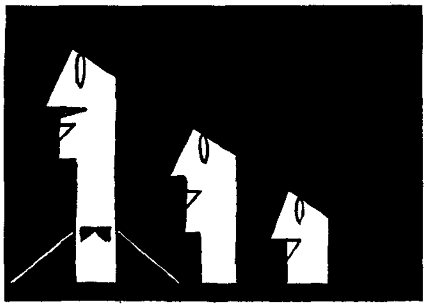


THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

Ancestral Voices—A staged reading, with a rotating cast, of A. R. Gurney's play, in which a Buffalo grandmother disrupts her family when she divorces her husband to marry his best friend. Preview on Oct. 17. Opens Oct. 18 at 8. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Atlantic Theatre Company—The troupe celebrates its fifteenth year with a season of plays by co-founder David Mamet. First up: "The Water Engine" and "Mr. Happiness." In previews through Oct 19. Opens Oct. 20 at 8. (336 W. 20th St. 645-1242.)

Barefoot Boy with Shoes On—A man living in a New York ghetto apartment tries to find a better life, in a drama by Edwin Sanchez. In previews through Oct. 19. Opens Oct. 20 at 7. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4502.)

Chesapeake—In a new play by Lee Blessing, Mark Linn-Baker stars as a performance artist scheming to sabotage a right-wing politician. Preview on Oct. 23. Opens Oct. 24 at 7. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

Cranes—Scott Elliott directs the New Group in a drama by Dmitry Lipkin, about two Russian-Jewish immigrant families who are reunited after years of estrangement. In previews through Oct. 19. Opens Oct. 20 at 8. (St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 279-4200.)

Dame Edna: The Royal Tour—Calling all possums: the singer, swami, grief counsellor, and children's book illustrator makes her Broadway début. In previews through Oct. 16. Opens Oct. 17 at 6:45. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Dinner with Friends—Donald Margulies' latest play is a drama about two couples whose friendship changes when one of them decides to divorce. Previews begin Oct. 21. (Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 13th St. 239-6200.)

An Experiment with an Air Pump—Linda Emond and Daniel Gerroll are in the cast of a new drama by Shelagh Stephenson. In previews through Oct 24. Opens Oct. 26 at 8. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 313 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Fuddy Meers—A comedy by David Lindsay-Abaire, about an amnesiac trying to regain her memory. In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Gum—Daphne Rubin-Vega has the lead in a play by Karen Hartman, about the fate of two veiled women who succumb to the allure of forbidden Juicy Fruit. In previews through Oct. 16. Opens Oct. 17 at 8. (Women's Project & Productions Theatre, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200.)

James Joyce's The Dead—A musical version of the short story, starring Christopher Walken. With a book by Richard Nelson and music by Shaun Davey. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

Look Back in Anger—A Classic Stage Company revival of John Osborne's 1956 drama. In previews through Oct. 16. Opens Oct. 17 at 7. (136 E. 13th St. 677-4210, ext. 10.)

North Atlantic—American culture and technology in the eighties is the subject of a multimedia work in progress written by James Strahs and staged by the Wooster Group. Performances begin Oct. 14 and continue through Nov. 21. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 966-3651.)

Odin Teatret—Denmark's experimental theatre comes to La Mama for a brief engagement, performing seven plays from their repertoire. Performances begin Oct. 13 at 8 and continue through Oct. 31. (74A E. 4th St. 475-7710.)

The Rainmaker—Jayne Atkinson and Woody Harrelson star in the Roundabout Theatre Company's revival of Richard Nash's 1954 drama, about a lonely spinster and a handsome stranger. Scott Ellis is the director. Previews begin Oct. 21. (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 307-4100.)

Saturday Night Fever—The musical, based on the 1977 film. Directed and choreographed by Arlene Phillips. In previews through Oct. 20. Opens Oct. 21 at 6:45. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

Shockheaded Peter—From London, Phelim McDermott and Julian Crouch's "junk opera" version of Heinrich Hoffman's macabre nineteenth-century book of cautionary tales for children. With songs written and performed by the Tiger Lilies. Performances begin Oct. 14 at 7 and continue through Oct. 31. (New Victory, 209 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

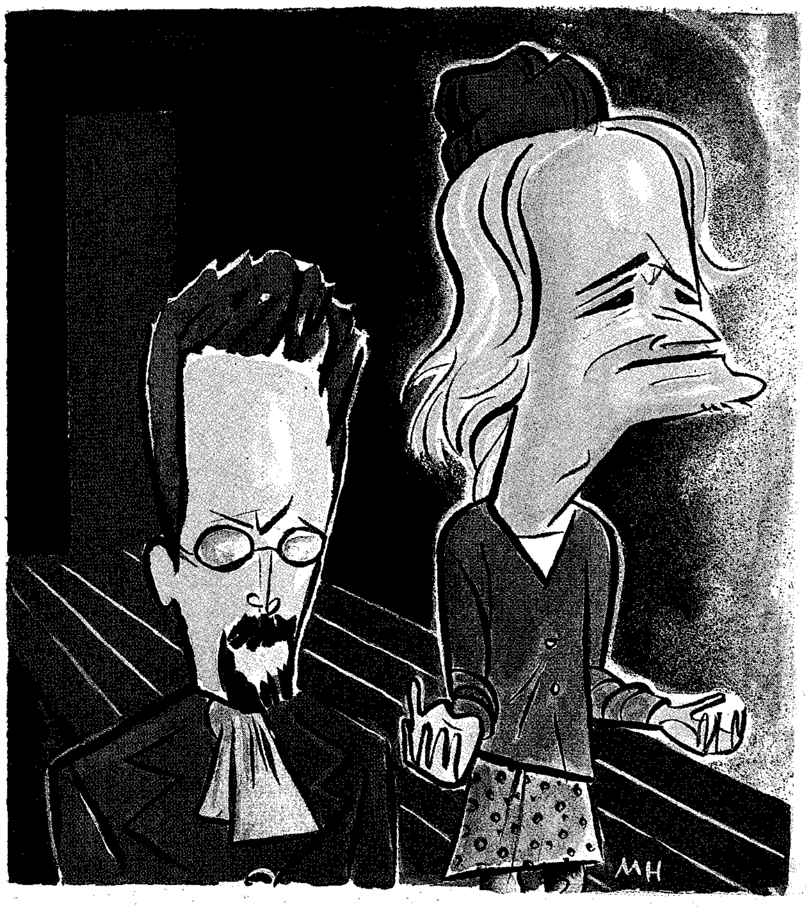
Stars in Your Eyes—A musical by Chip Meyrelles, set in two small towns during the Kennedy Administration, in which the Man in the Moon guides the lives of six people. In previews through Oct. 23. Opens Oct. 24 at 7. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.)

Tulpa—The Target Margin Theatre opens a season dedicated to new works with a play by Todd Alcott, in which a religious leader travels to New York to spread her mystical secrets. In previews Oct. 13-18. Opens Oct. 19 at 8. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202.)

OPENED RECENTLY

Avenue A—The 29th Street Rep's production of David Steen's drama about the effects of urban decay. (212 W. 29th St. 465-0575.)

Big Blonde—The title character in Peter Mattaliano's adaptation of a Dorothy Parker story is a young woman who starts out as a "good sport" and ends up an alcoholic not unlike Parker herself—but without the wit and intelligence. The surprising drama and poignancy in her complete lack of imagination and gumption add up to a familiar (but always timely) cautionary tale; it's more than didactic, though, thanks to live music (by Joan Cargill and Lennie McKenzie) and some fine performances (notably Jennifer Spahr in the title role and Lou George, as several of her lovers). (113 Gallery, 113 Ludlow St. 253-1813.)



"Nirvanov," a rock-and-roll version of Chekhov's "Ivanov."

MARCELLUS HALL

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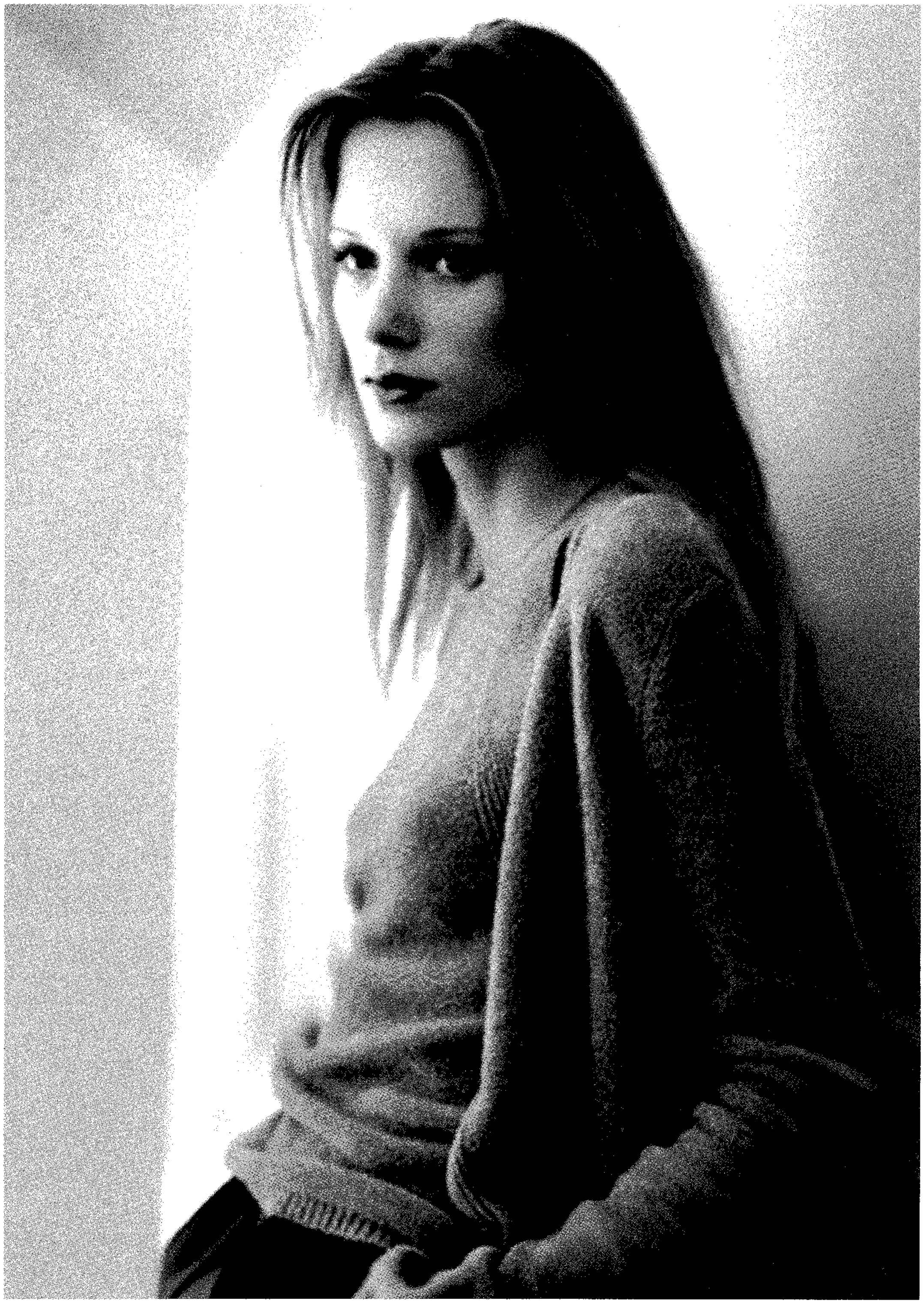


GIORGIO ARMANI
LE COLLEZIONI

Brooklyn Academy of Music—Oct. 13-16 at 7:30 and Oct 17 at 3: "Life Is a Dream," Calderón's seventeenth-century philosophical drama, about a prince imprisoned in a tower by his father, in a staging by Scotland's Royal Lyceum Theatre. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100.)

The Clearing—The Blue Light Theatre Company's season opener is a drama by Helen Edmundson, set in Ireland during Cromwell's occupation. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 279-4200. Closes Oct. 31.)

Contact—A dance-play about romantic dreams, co-conceived by Susan Stroman (choreography and direction) and John Weidman (book). (Reviewed in this issue.) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

The Countess—Gregory Murphy's play, which tells the story of how the nineteenth-century art critic John Ruskin's wife left him for the painter John Everett Millais, is a vivid exploration of the self-indulgent pleasures of small-mindedness (in this case, Ruskin's and his parents'). (Samuel Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 594-2826.)

The Country Club—Douglas Carter Beane's satire on the young suburban set is loaded with witty dialogue, and the production is graced by the Drama Dept.'s always good acting and a fine set, but Beane's writing suffers from a peculiar shallowness almost worthy of his characters. They satirize themselves, too, but in the end it all has the effect of a valentine rather than a truly biting sendup. They do hateful, pathetic things, yet the audience laughs along acceptingly, with barely a trace of introspection or disgust. (Greenwich House, 27 Barrow St. 541-8441. Closes Nov. 6.)

Epic Proportions—Kristin Chenoweth heads the cast of a new comedy by Larry Coen and David Crane. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

The Exact Center of the Universe—Joan Vail Thorne's comedy, in which a small-town Southerner (Reed Birney) is torn between his overbearing mother (Frances Sternhagen) and his sweetheart (Tracy Thorne). (Century Theatre, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

Fully Committed—This funny one-man, one-act comedy is a tribute to starving actors everywhere, who slave away in the food-service industry to make ends meet. Mark Setlock plays a lovable reservations clerk at a tony unnamed Manhattan restaurant, who deals with a daily deluge of calls from dying-to-be guests. Setlock works overtime impersonating such callers as Naomi Campbell's overzealous assistant ("Thanks a gazillion!") and a stubborn mafioso, among others. The play was developed by Setlock and Becky Mode (a writer for "Cosby"), both of whom paid their dues working tables. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 353-3366. Closes Oct. 30.)

Give Me Your Answer, Do!—The Irish playwright Brian Friel's latest drama, in a typically fine production by the Roundabout, investigates the havoc that the cruel push and pull between art and commerce wreaks on the lives of artists. Two Irish friends and novelists, one a commercial failure (John Glover), the other a best-seller (Gawn Grainger, in an anxiously heartbreaking performance), come together with their wives (and some in-laws and a literary archivist) for a late-summer afternoon of cocktails and angst. One of them feels guilty because he has sold out, the other feels guilty because he might want to, and the whole thing builds to a vaguely "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" fervor in the second act. But the performances are exhilarating (Kate Burton, as Glover's defeated, alcoholic wife, and Joel Grey, as her kleptomaniac lounge-pianist father, are especially good), so you forgive the unnecessarily melodramatic ending. (Gramercy, 127 E. 23rd St. 777-4900.)

Gospel Is—A musical by Vy Higginsen and Ken Wydro, which traces the history of gospel. (Williams Lafayette Theatre, 2225 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd., at 131st St. 280-1045.)

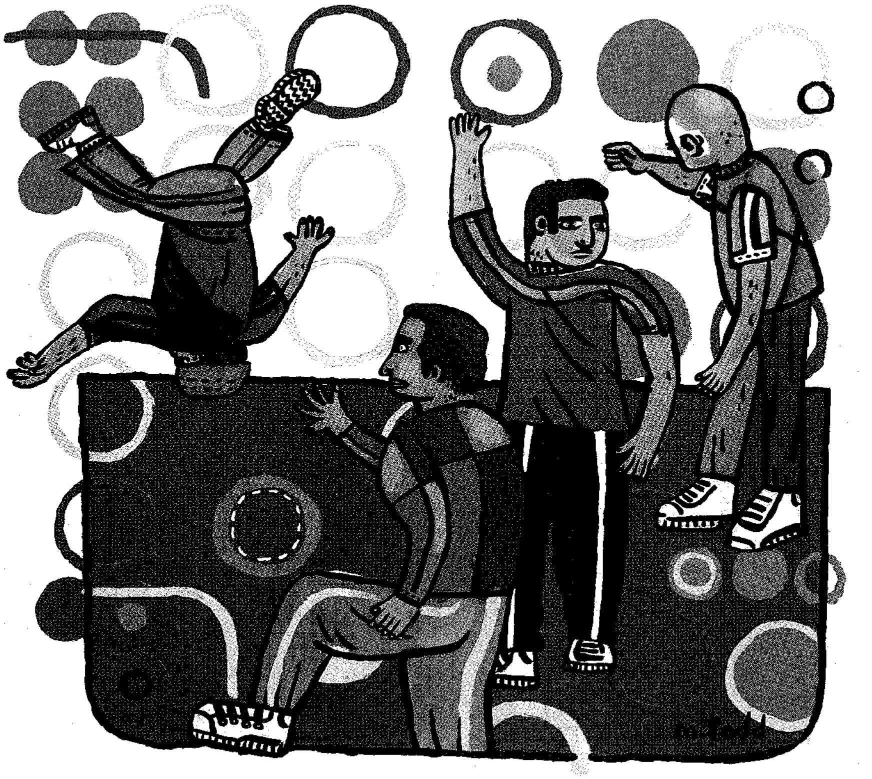
Kat and the Kings—A rock-and-roll musical set in Cape Town in 1957. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

Laguna Beach—The second season of David Latham's comic serial soap opera continues, Saturdays at midnight, through Nov. 20. (HERE, 145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. 647-0202.)

Mirandolina—The Pearl Theatre Company opens the season with Goldoni's 1753 comedy. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802. Closes Oct. 24.)

Nirvanov—A rock-and-roll adaptation of Chekhov's "Ivanov." Fridays and Saturdays at 11, through Oct. 30. (78th Street Theatre Lab, 236 W. 78th St. 946-1284.)

Nuyorican Stories: Culture Clash in the City—In this charming pastiche, the Latino comedy troupe Culture Clash (Richard Montoya, Ric Salinas, and Herbert Siguenza) deftly investigates the triumphs and downfalls of several important figures in New York Latino culture since the seventies. Even if you're not versed in the culture's history, it's a well-spent evening of rare theatrical insight with three appealing and talented actors. (INTAR 53, 508 W. 53rd St. 279-4200. Closes Oct. 24.)



Compagnie Käfig, the French-Algerian hip-hop dance troupe, performs at Hostos.

MARK TODD

Things You Shouldn't Say Past Midnight—Peter Ackerman's screwball bedroom comedy about the proper balance between intellectual and physical attraction is highlighted by a sublimely ridiculous conference call involving three pairs of lovers. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 580-1313.)

The Vagina Monologues—Eve Ensler, in her one-woman disquisition. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.)

Voices in the Dark—In this age of computer-generated gore, the actress Judith Ivey, playwright John Pielmeier ("Agnes of God"), and director Christopher Ashley have achieved the impossible, a truly thrilling stage thriller. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

The Winds of God—The premise of this Japanese import is weird: two shlumpy modern-day comedians are somehow reverse-reincarnated into the bodies of kamikaze pilots in the particularly inauspicious month of August 1945. But it works. The script (by Masayuki Imai, who also directed and stars) could use some trimming, but the play is, in the end, a brave study of Japanese culture. Imai examines how the obsession with societal honor which led pilots to volunteer for suicide missions seems to have evolved into selfishness and vapidity in the nineties; questions of what to believe, and how to believe, he implies, rarely come up. And much of the evening is very funny. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 840-3074.)

LONG RUNS

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN: Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CABARET:** Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **CHICAGO:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **DEATH OF A SALESMAN:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. (Closes Nov. 7.) . . . **DE LA GUARDA:** Daryl Roth, 20 Union Sq. E., at 15th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **FOOTLOOSE:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **FORBIDDEN BROADWAY:** Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200. . . . **FOSSE:** Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH:** Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. . . . **I LOVE YOU, YOU'RE PERFECT, NOW CHANGE:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200. . . . **IT AIN'T NOTHIN' BUT THE BLUES:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **JEKYLL & HYDE:** Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **LATE-NITE CATECHISM:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE LION KING:** New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS:** John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **RAGTIME:** Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 42nd St. 307-4100. . . . **RENT:** Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St.

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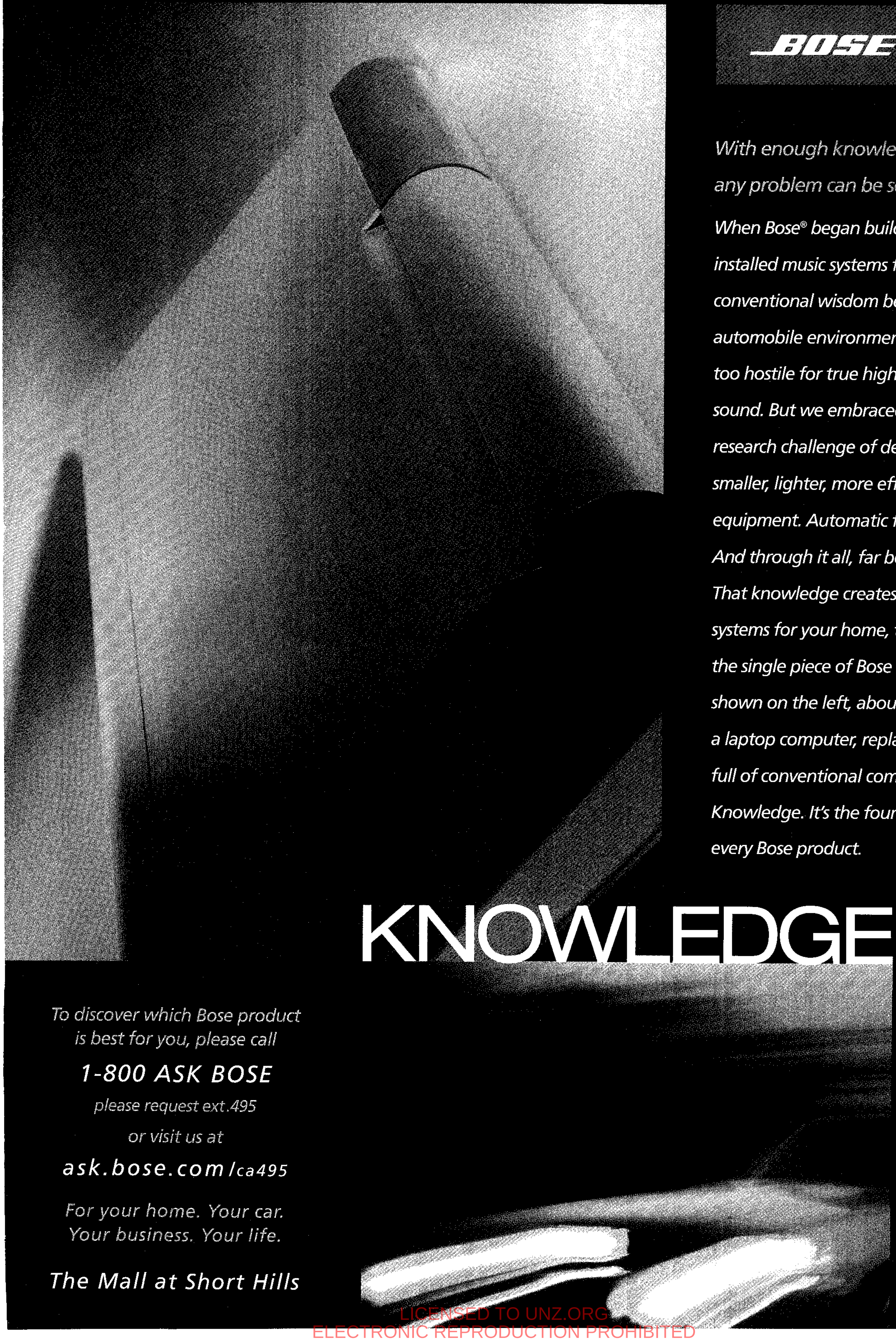

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921-8000. . . . **SECRETS EVERY SMART TRAVELER SHOULD KNOW:** Ibis, 327 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **SIDE MAN:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200. (Closes Oct. 31.) . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. Luke's Church, 308 W. 46th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE WEIR:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200. . . . **WIT:** Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.

DANCE

Australian Ballet—The Melbourne-based troupe presents six ballets, including "Rites," a collaboration between the company and the Aboriginal Bangarra Dance Theatre. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Oct. 12 at 7:30, Oct. 13-15 at 8, Oct. 16 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 17 at 3.)

American Ballet Theatre—Oct. 19 at 7: "Le Corsaire" pas de deux, "Without Words" pas de deux, "Jubilee," "Pas des Déesses," "Other Dances," and a pièce d'occasion for the opening-night gala. . . . ¶ Oct. 20 at 8: "Without Words," "Billy the Kid," and "Known by Heart." . . ¶ Oct. 21 at 8: "Without Words," "Grand Pas Classique," "Other Dances," and "Push Comes to Shove." . . ¶ Oct. 22 at 8: "Pas des Déesses," the première of "Heaven's Meadow," and "Billy the Kid." . . ¶ Oct. 23 at 2: "Pas des Déesses," "Diversion of Angels," "Other Dances," and "Push Comes to Shove." . . ¶ Oct. 23 at 8: "Diversion of Angels," "Le Corsaire" pas de deux, "Heaven's Meadow," and "Known by Heart." . . ¶ Oct. 24 at 2: "Pas des Déesses," "Other Dances," "Diversion of Angels," and "Billy the Kid." . . ¶ Oct. 24 at 7:30: "Without Words," "Billy the Kid," and "Push Comes to Shove." . . ¶ Oct. 26 at 8: "Diversion of Angels," a pas de deux, "Heaven's Meadow," and "Known by Heart." (City Center. Through Oct. 31.)

Lyon Opera Ballet—The company presents two works by the Swedish choreographer Mats Ek, "Carmen" and "Solo for Two." (Brooklyn Academy of Music, Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St. 718-636-4100. Oct. 19-23 at 7:30 and Oct. 24 at 3.)

Limón Dance Company—The fifty-two-year-old modern-dance troupe offers new works ("The Plain Sense of Things," by Doug Varone, and "Dark Elegies," by Antony Tudor), the re-creation of Sophie Maslow's "Champion," and three works by company founder José Limón. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. Oct. 12-15 at 8, Oct. 16 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 17 at 2 and 7:30.)

Ballet: The Daring Project—New works from the ballerina Valentina Kozlova and the choreographer Margo Sappington and their ten-member company: "Calling," "3 Out of 7 (Deadly Sins)," and "Juliana," which is based on a Borges story. (Joyce Theatre. Oct. 19-22 at 8, Oct. 23 at 2 and 8, and Oct. 24 at 2 and 7:30.)

"New Europe '99"—A multivenue festival brings the latest from the stages of the Old World. Oct. 13-15 at 8 and Oct. 16 at 3: Sasha Pepelyaev's Kinetic Theatre, from Russia, in "One Second Hand." (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077.) . . ¶ Oct. 14-16 at 8:30: The Pierre Droleurs company, from Belgium, in "De l'Air et du Vent." (Danspace Project, St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194.) . . ¶ Oct. 15-16 at 7:30: Compagnie Käfig, a French-Algerian hip-hop troupe from Lyon, presents "Récital" on a bill with Full Circle Souljahz, from the Bronx, in "Soular Power-d." (Hostos Center for the Arts and Culture, 450 Grand Concourse, at 149th St. 718-518-4455.) . . ¶ Oct. 15-16 at 8: The Diana Thedim Company blends the traditions of Spanish flamenco and Portuguese fado in "Iberos." (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St. 772-4448.) . . ¶ Oct. 20-24, from 7 to 11: Cie Felix Ruckert, from Germany, offers "Hautnah," in which audience members negotiate with dancers of their choice for one-on-one performances. (Joyce SoHo, 155 Mercer St. No reservations, admissions at door. For more information, call 924-0077. Through Oct. 30.) . . ¶ Oct. 22-24 at 8:30: The Venezuelan choreographer Sara Gebran, with an international trio of dancers, presents "She Shrieks," and the Finnish soloist Virpi Pahkinen brings "Saligram." (Danspace Project.)

"Not Garden"—A single performance of Stephen Petronio's evening-length work, with music by Diamanda Galas, David Linton, and Sheila Chandra. (Danspace Project. Oct. 17 at 8:30.)

"Urban Artworks 7"—Seven choreographers, including Mary Blackburn, Erica Dankmeyer, Mollie O'Brien, and Katrina van Zee, offer new works. (Pace Downtown Theatre, Spruce St. between Nassau and Gold Sts. 346-1715. Oct. 15-17 at 8.)

"Lava Love"—Sarah East Johnson's troupe, Lava, presents a slate of circus-skill routines—trapeze and balancing acts, hoop diving, human pyramids, hula-hoop and pogo-stick numbers—performed with subtleties of pace and emphasis taken from the world of dance. (Flea Theatre, 41 White St. 226-0051. Oct. 14-15 and Oct. 21-22 at 8 and Oct. 16 and Oct. 23 at 3 and 8. Through Oct. 30.)

Ibrahim Ferrer plays the Beacon Theatre.

MAX VADUKUL

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

Sam Newsome and Global Unity—Once a hard-bopping tenor saxophonist who was best known for his stint in Terence Blanchard's band, Newsome made an abrupt change in 1996 and began concentrating solely on the soprano saxophone, infused with a world-music sensibility. Mainstream jazz's loss is fin-de-siècle eclecticism's gain. (Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. 708-9480. Oct. 15 at 5:30.)

Robbie Williams—Like the electronica calvary that never came, the handsome designated savior of Brit pop has become the great media-hype machine's latest also-ran. For fans of solid, charismatic pop singers, this is a blessing in disguise. Williams's latest, "The Ego Has Landed," is a keeper, a tuneful mother lode of dance-floor gold. (Hammerstein Ballroom, Manhattan Center, 311 W. 34th St. 564-4882. Oct. 15 at 8.)

"Lincoln Center's American Songbook"—Lea DeLaria, Gregg Edelman, Maureen McGovern, pianist Dick Hyman, and others pay tribute to composer Jimmy Van Heusen. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. Oct. 15-16 at 8.)

Elton John—The don of all divas, in a solo performance. A man, a piano, a wig or two, costume changes, boas, etc. In other words, a great show. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Oct. 15-16 at 8.)

Rick Springfield—He was both a matinée idol and a star on "General Hospital" (just like Ricky Martin!), and now the man who gave the world "Jessie's Girl" is back. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. Oct. 16 at 8.)

David Bromberg—The enfant terrible of seventies acoustic music leads his own band. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. Oct. 16 at 8.)

"VP Records 20th Anniversary Concert"—In 1958 a jukebox-maintenance man named Vincent Chin and his wife, Patricia, opened a store in Kingston, Jamaica, selling surplus reggae records. The store, called Randy's, quickly became the center of the local music scene, and its popularity pushed the Chins into production (their first great success was with the balladeer Lord Creator). Twenty years ago they expanded, opening VP Records in Jamaica, Queens, and have since become the largest independent distributor of reggae music in the country. Many of their more contemporary stars, including Beenie Man, Morgan Heritage, Buju Banton, Luciano, Beres Hammond, Anthony B, and Freddie McGregor, pay tribute to the Chins. (Theatre at Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Oct. 18 at 7.)

"The Bluegrass Sessions"—Banjo master Béla Fleck is joined by Sam Bush on mandolin, Jerry Douglas on Dobro, Mark Schatz on bass fiddle, and Brian Sutton on guitar. (Town Hall. Oct. 20 at 8.)

John Mellencamp—Like his longtime chart rival Tom Petty, Mellencamp recently emerged from a lengthy hiatus, turned in a fine record, "John Mellencamp," and discovered the painful truth, that the pop charts are hopelessly ageist. With the blues dynamo Susan Tedeschi. (Madison Square Garden. 307-7171. Oct. 21 at 8.)

Jazz at Lincoln Center—An evening featuring small ensembles made up of Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra members. Wynton Marsalis takes his cues from Duke Ellington by extracting small groups from the core of his big band to play the music of, who else?, Ellington. Trombonist Wycliffe Gordon, saxophonist Wess Anderson, and trumpeters Ryan Kisor and Marcus Printup have yet to fully mature as individual stylists, but each is a fully seasoned and confident improviser. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5599. Oct. 21 and Oct. 23 at 8.)

Steve Kirby Quartet—A terrific bassist who brought a swaggering bottom end to Cyrus Chestnut's last trio, Kirby has a secure future ahead of him as long as decorous players with rich sounds stay in vogue. (Museum of Modern Art. Oct. 22 at 5:30.)

Ibrahim Ferrer and **Rubén González**—A double bill of key players in the Buena Vista Social Club. Ferrer, a singer who has been called the "Nat (King) Cole of Cuba," will lead his orchestra, and the fiery octogenarian pianist González will be backed by his own band. (Beacon Theatre. Oct. 22 at 8.)

Cesaria Evora—A breath of cool tropical air from São Vicente (a tiny island off the coast of Senegal), Evora is known as the Barefoot Diva, a reference both to her performance style and to the earthy, laid-back feel of

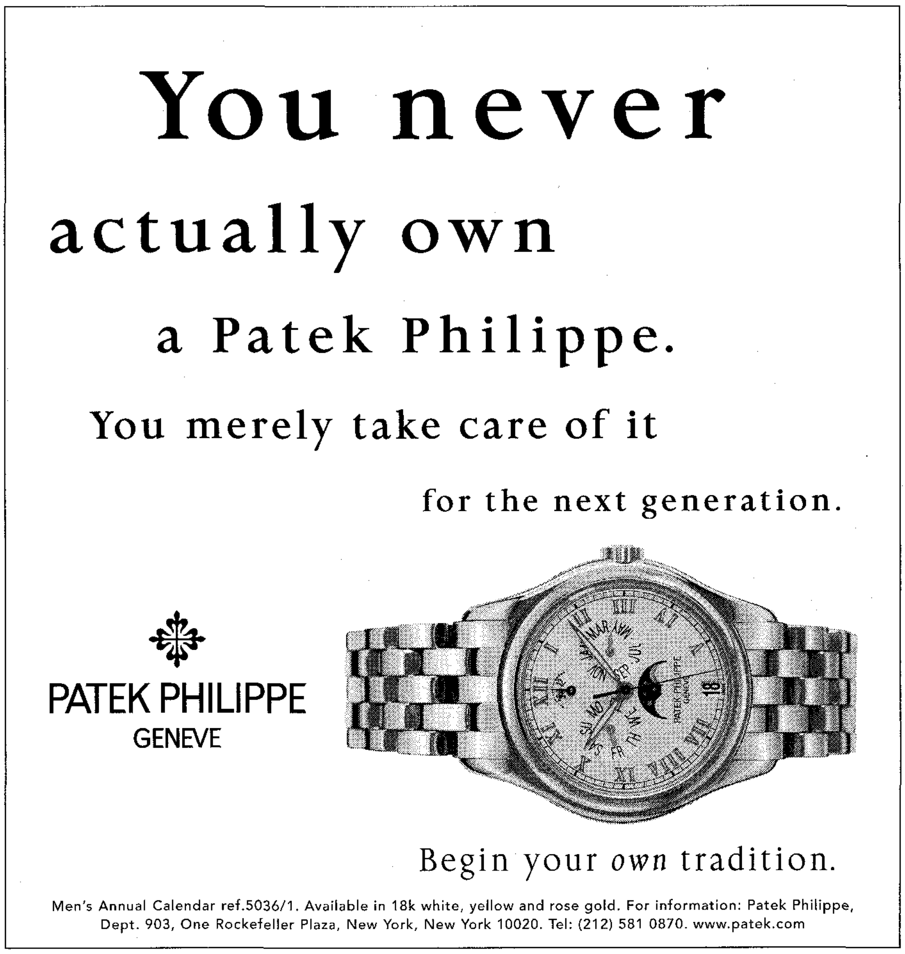
ROCK NOTES

Kneel, Young—Just when it seemed as if the long-promised demise of rock were no longer an exaggeration and kiddie pop ruled the land, a battalion of (relative) old-timers have returned to rev things up.

Euphoria Morning (A&M), the solo début of former Soundgarden singer Chris Cornell, may be the first new record to be instantly classifiable as "classic" rock. Cornell, a relic from the now-scorned era of grunge, is the purest chest-pounding howler the form has produced since Led Zeppelin's Robert Plant. His voice requires its own area code. Working carefully with layered guitars and antique amplifiers, he's made an accomplished rock-singer's record that fuses the muscle of grunge with the lyricism of Lennon and McCartney. It's an unlikely triumph that suggests that metal doesn't always have to be heavy.

Neil Young spent the past decade embracing his role as grunge's Edmund Wilson—his influence on Soundgarden and Pearl Jam cannot be underestimated. On **Looking Forward** (Reprise), his epochal reunion with Messrs. Crosby, Stills & Nash (the last time these guys were linked by an ampersand we were in the Reagan Administration), Young shuts off his fuzz box and puts on his folk hat. The leadoff track, "Faith in Me," a frisky, harmony-happy rave-up in the tradition of "Suite: Judy Blue Eyes," triggers a certain nostalgic thrill, and "Forward" features a series of solo tunes in which Young croons, Stills growls, Nash preaches, and Crosby repents. The album, however, proves the rule of supergroups: the whole rarely equals the sum of the parts.

In the early eighties, before teaching every guitar player in Seattle how to lumber the right way, Young made a record called "Trans," an experiment in what today would be called electronica. "Trans" was terrible, but you can bet the young Trent Reznor was listening. **The Fragile** (Nothing/Interscope), the first CD in five years from Reznor's band, Nine Inch Nails, is a hundred-plus minutes of assaultive, angst-filled electronic music, much of it made with impossibly distorted guitars. The disk should finally convince people that machine music can make for excruciatingly human rock and roll. "Underneath it all/we feel so small," Reznor sings on "The Way Out Is Through," but, surrounded by the roiling synthesizers and cataclysmic drums that fill up "The Fragile," it's hard to recall any recent album ever feeling bigger.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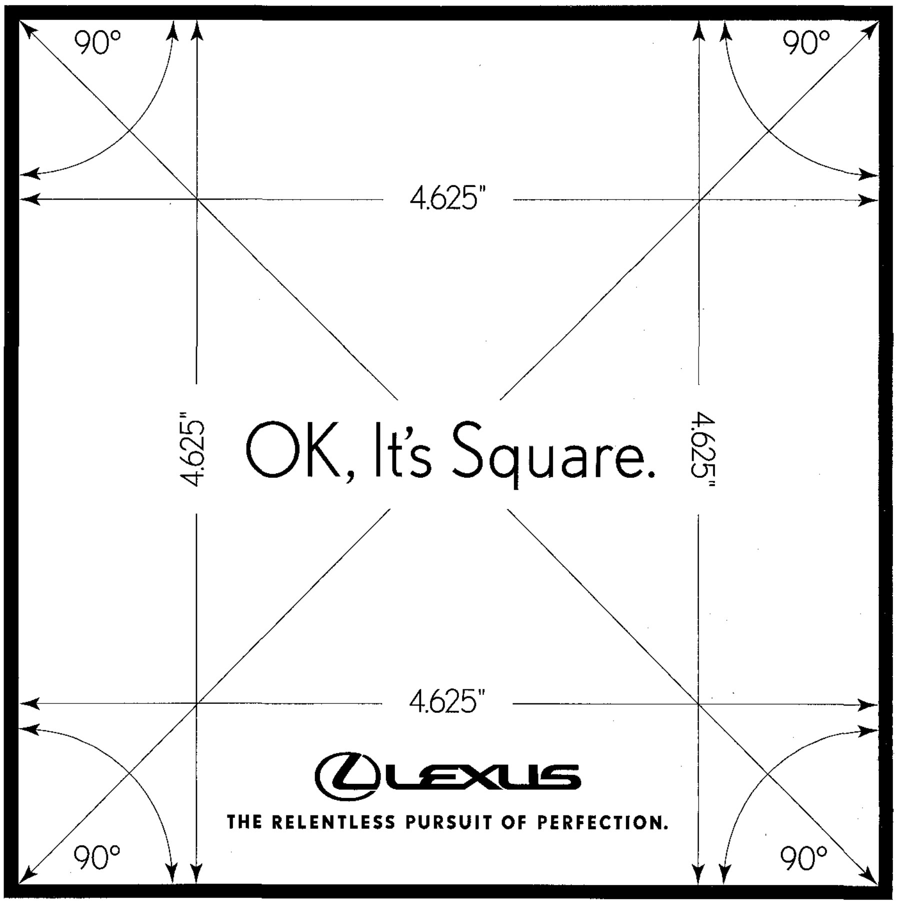
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morna, the dreamy bossa-nova blues that makes her shows so delightful. With the exceptional Cuban guitarist Juan-Carlos Formell. (Town Hall. Oct. 23 at 8.)

Elvis Costello—After finding his perfect soul mate in Burt Bacharach, and making one of the finer records of his gilded career, Costello reunites with his own piano man, former Attraction Steve Nieve. (Beacon Theatre. Oct. 24-25 at 8.)

Merle Haggard—The grizzled, ornery master of drivin', drinkin', and thinkin' songs brings a little prairie dust to town. Joining him in wizened wisdom is fellow Highwayman Kris Kristofferson. (Town Hall. Oct. 25 at 8.)

Bette Midler—For students of divatude, a gig by the divine Ms. M. in the same fortnight as a visit from Elton John makes for an embarrassment of boas. Midler has calmed down a tad since she went Hollywood (and started cleaning up our highways), but she's still capable of turning an arena into a raging bathhouse. (Madison Square Garden. Oct. 25-26 at 8.)

CLUBS

(Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

Bottom Line, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—Oct. 22: A night of top-shelf folk, with old-time hero **Ramblin' Jack Elliott,** maturing young troubadour **John Wesley Harding,** and hard-touring Bostonian **Ellis Paul.**

Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—Oct. 13: **Len,** basking in the strength of its single "Steal My Sunshine," which was something of a surprise hit this summer. With the rappers **Styles of Beyond.** Oct. 15: Former Blasters guitarist **Dave Alvin.** Oct. 19: The much-admired San Francisco-based aural collagist **DJ Shadow,** whose laconic grooves are as warm as his perpetual wool hat. Oct. 20-23: **They Might Be Giants** treat their hometown fans to a four-night stand. With **Mike Viola and the Candy Butchers** on Oct. 21.

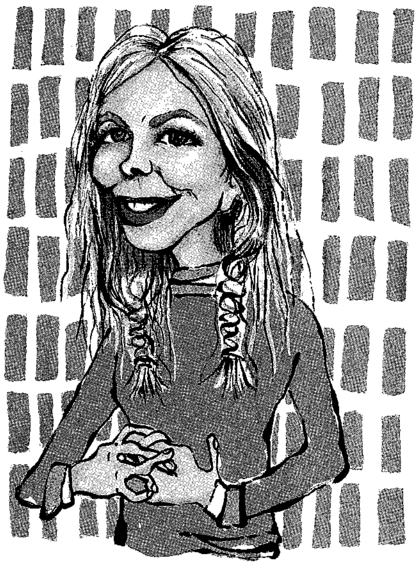
Brownies, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—Oct. 15-16: The witty pop of the Berlin-based **Stereo Total.**

Continental, 25 Third Ave., at St. Marks Pl. (529-6924)—Oct. 15: The **Demolition Doll Rods,** an all-girl trio (with a transvestite guitarist named Danny) from Detroit, believe in stripping down to the basics—they have no bass and only two drums, and they perform in bikinis and pasties made of such items as hubcaps, toilet plungers, and dog biscuits. Their live shows are festivals of high-energy garage-rock burlesque.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—Oct. 13: **Wilson Pickett,** whose dangerous allure earned him the nickname the Wicked Pickett, is back onstage in support of his new album, "It's Harder Now," his first in twelve years. Oct. 14: **Zap Mama,** founded by the Belgian-Zairean singer Marie Daulne, is a multiethnic vocal collective (predominantly a-cappella, although they've recently increased their use of percussion) that employs a variety of languages and styles (French, Spanish, Pygmy chants, and Syrian pop, among others) to create densely textured melodies and hypnotic polyrhythms. Oct. 16: An evening with the former Led Zeppelin bassist and multi-instrumentalist **John Paul Jones.** Oct. 18: Mid-eighties English New Wave gets a workout in this nostalgic triple bill featuring Goth meisters **The Mission UK,** androgynous poseurs **Gene Loves Jezebel,** and former Alarm vocalist **Mike Peters.** Oct. 19: **The Buzzcocks.** Having inspired such shameless imitators as Green Day and Blink 182, the deans of snot-nosed punk pop return to say, We told you so. With the **Lunachicks** and **Down by Law.** Oct. 20: **Burning Spear,** which is led by one of reggae's prime Rasta prophets, Winston Rodney. Oct. 23: **Squeeze.**

Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Oct. 15 and Oct. 17-18: **Rickie Lee Jones.**

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Oct. 14-16: Mr. Ice Cream Man, **Jonathan Richman.** Oct. 20: The ever-evolving English neo-psychedelia of the **Bevis Frond,** which was assisted on its latest album, "Vavona Bur," by Country Joe McDonald. With the front-porch ballads of **Clem Snide.**



SOUNDS OF THE FUTURE: *In 1997, the brilliant singer and songwriter Rickie Lee Jones released "Ghostyhead," which turned out to be one of the best albums of the year. Incorporating sampling and mixing effects that one would never expect from an artist of her generation, Jones created a unique amalgam of folk-pop and hip-hop—a truly integrated record. By turns haunting, haunted, and hopeful, Jones's new sound was revelatory. But when she went on tour that summer, with one of the tightest bands around, audiences, by and large, weren't having it. Hecklers demanded that she sing pop classics from her seminal first album, "Rickie Lee Jones," without giving the new songs a chance. If the fans that come to see Jones at Joe's Pub this weekend are a little more grown-up, they should get a chance to hear her perform from an underrated work of pure genius.*

ROBERT MELEE

Makor, 35 W. 67th St. (601-1000)—A cozy new lounge on the Upper West Side. Oct. 19: Brazilian guitarist **Vinicius Cantuária.**

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—Oct. 13: Former Minuteman bassist **Mike Watt** barrels into town. With Cleveland's hard-rocking **Cobra Verde.** Oct. 14: **Stereo Total** (see Brownies). With the raunchy faux-French rock and roll of Brooklyn's **Les Sans Culottes.** Oct. 17: **Jonathan Richman** and **Clem Snide** (see the Knitting Factory). Oct. 18: **The Buzzcocks** (see Irving Plaza). Oct. 21-22: **Kristin Hersh,** a graduate of the postmodern girl group Throwing Muses, turns out spare, atmospheric albums emphasizing the creepy charms of her voice. Her latest is "Sky Motel." Oct. 22: The sophisticated synth pop of **Magnetic Fields.**

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—Oct. 14: **Mike Watt** and **Cobra Verde** (see Maxwell's). Oct. 21: The quiet and wholesome folk-pop of **Innocence Mission,** a trio formed thirteen years ago by high-school friends from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Lead singer Karen Peris has such a delicate and ethereal voice that it makes the band's songs sound as if they were relics of a lost era. Oct. 23: The crisp, atmospheric sounds of **Wheat.**

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Bam Café, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—Oct. 15: Singer **Nora York's** clever conflations of iconic pop, jazz, gospel, and what-have-you into mix-and-match set pieces are ingenious, but her affecting originals are what truly expose the quirky near-genius of this extravagant talent.

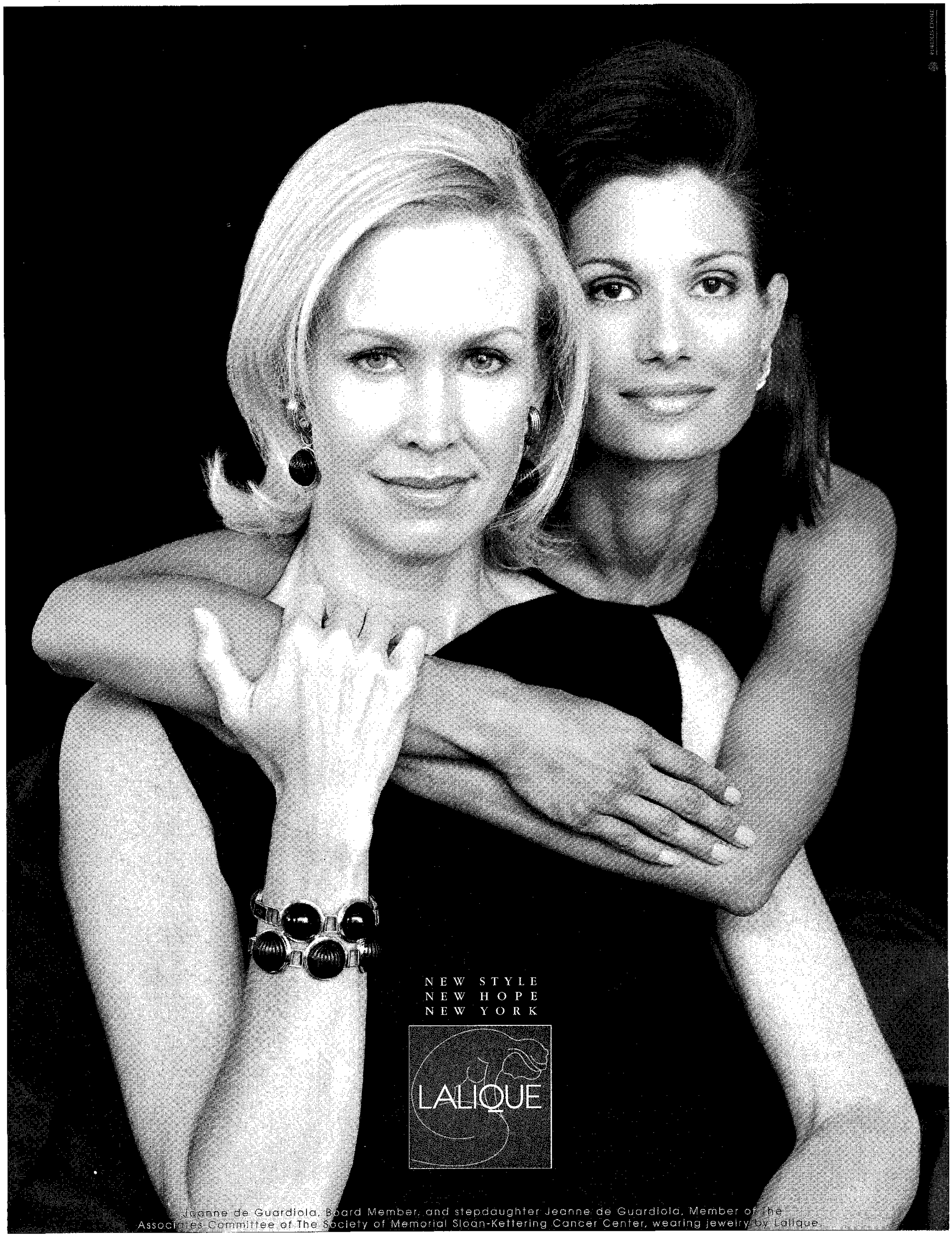
Birdland, 315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—Oct. 13: You simply surrender yourself to pianist **James Williams,** letting his soulful keyboard excursions and classic bebop lines wash over you like summer rain. His increasingly seasoned band, Intensive Care Unit, is becoming a welcome presence, too. Oct. 15-16: The revival of all things seventies unfortunately includes jazz fusion, hence the return of guitarist **Larry Coryell's Eleventh House,** a third-rate Mahavishnu Orchestra back then, a perplexing nostalgia trip today. Oct. 21-23: He may be the world's most famous jazz bassist, but being a perennial gun-for-hire has never been enough for **Ron Carter.** A fine composer and a crafty bandleader—the nucleus of the celebrated band Sphere was once his rhythm section—Carter is now leading a nonet, which should provide him with all the tonal coloring he needs to present his case as a significant artist. Dining.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through Oct. 17: Expect pianist **Chick Corea** to make a good showing with his newest band, Origin. A fully stocked, all-acoustic ensemble, Origin features Corea's spirited playing and spicy originals as well as feisty interaction with his younger band members. Oct. 19-24: The **Dizzy Gillespie Alumni All-Stars.** Dining.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through Oct. 17: The **Jimmy Smith** quartet. The Hammond organ was certainly around before the mid-fifties, when Smith started messing with it, but can anyone remember what it was used for? His influence is so pervasive that his name has become practically synonymous with the instrument. With the hip-hop nation now picking up on his classic blues-driven grooves, Smith is as happening as ever. Oct. 19-24: The **Richard Bona** quartet. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Oct. 13-17: The **Sonny Fortune** quartet. A quadruple threat who has mastered the tenor, alto, and soprano saxophones as well as the flute, Fortune is a veteran always worth checking up on. Oct. 19-24: **Billy Higgins and the True Blue All-Stars.** There's not a single recording on Blue Note that's credited solely to Higgins, yet this sublime drummer has as much right to represent that classic label as, say, Joe Henderson. Smilin' Billy can light up a room with just the sound of his purring ride cymbal. He's as fine a drummer as jazz has ever seen, and he's been playing at a peak level that belies his recent health problems. Joining him are Blue Note alumni **Curtis Fuller** on trombone, saxophonist **James Spaulding** (another label pinch-hitter who never recorded his own album), and pianist **Ronnie Matthews.**

Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—Oct. 16: Vocalese, the practice of putting lyrics to the melodies of recorded improvised instrumental solos, is an acquired taste—it's tongue-twisting gibberish to some, high



Jeanne de Guardiola, Board Member, and stepdaughter Jeanne de Guardiola, Member of the Associates Committee of The Society of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, wearing jewelry by Lalique.

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art to others. The dapper JON HENDRICKS and the elegant ANNIE ROSS are just about the best practitioners of the technique, having put it on the map with their late trio, Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross, and they're keeping the tradition alive in high style.

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Oct. 13: NORA YORK (see BAM Café). Oct. 14-16: With his band Latin for Travelers, super-drummer BOBBY PREVITE brings it back home again for some loud and proud playing that doesn't turn up its nose at rock influences. Oct. 17: The DON BYRON–STEVE LACY quartet. It's been a great season for unprecedented jazz duets: witness the recent Elvin Jones–Cecil Taylor and Jim Hall–Dave Holland hookups. Now comes a meeting of two brilliant exponents of straight horns—Lacy on soprano saxophone and Byron on clarinet. Each has the talent to unlock hidden potential in the other: Byron may coax out the wolf in his coolly calculating partner, while Lacy may temper the unruliness of Byron's blowing. Oct. 21-24: The daring and imaginative LEON PARKER may be the most interesting jazz drummer to surface in years, but these days jazz is often the last thing on his mind. He's been performing solo recently, using interaction with the audience and the percussive capabilities of his own body to generate infectious rhythm. He's definitely on to something, but his outrageously swinging kit drumming is still missed.

S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—Oct. 18: EDDIE PALMIERI'S fervent hard-bop and salsa-inflected rhythms don't always translate well onstage, where the cigar-chomping pianist tends to grandstand, but when the pieces do fall together, the set's a smoker. Dining.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—Through Oct. 17: Making some of the smartest music around, the exceptional saxophonist and clarinettist MARTY EHRLICH revels in such post-sixties freedoms as modernist harmony and free-wheeling expressionism, while keeping guard with structure and swing.

Up Over Jazz Cafe, 351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—Oct. 15-16: Pianist RONNIE MATHEWS stops by with his trio, which features bassist WALTER BOOKER and drummer JIMMY COBB. Oct. 22-23: The MICHAEL WEISS quartet.

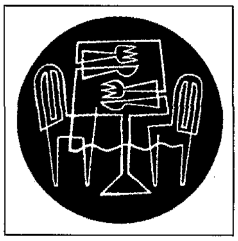
Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Change can be a good thing, even if you've got a good thing already going. Pianist FRED HERSCH (here through Oct. 17) is taking a break from his longtime, and by now telepathically linked, trio to experiment with a quintet featuring the new rhythm team of bassist REID ANDERSON, drummer NASHEET WAITS, and the provocative (for Hersch) addition of two horn players: RALPH ALESSI on trumpet and RICH PERRY on tenor sax. Oct. 19-24: It's been a while since the vibraphone had a bright new champion, but STEFON HARRIS has come to the rescue. A skittery approach to his instrument and a close association with jazz upstart Greg Osby give Harris an exciting edge. The VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—"Portraits by Ingres: Image of an Epoch." Beginning with a gravely pompous image of the Emperor Napoléon (looking disquietingly like the current Mayor of New York), this ravishing show surveys the superb French draftsman's greatest works. Ingres himself wouldn't have been happy with it, since he hoped to be remembered principally for his insipid mythological tableaux. With those more troublesome works excluded, however, his genius shines. The small drawn likenesses are passionately, even miraculously articulate, and their psychological acuity rivals Rembrandt's. Ingres was, one is tempted to say, the reason God invented graphite. In the painted portraits, he polished his aristocratic models to an unearthly, Apollonian sheen. The artist who famously denigrated the importance of color was also the finest colorist of his age. The catalogue is an excellent accompaniment to this exceptional show, in part because it documents the fascinating subsequent histories of Ingres's sitters. Through Jan. 2. . . . ¶ "Carleton Watkins: The Art of Perception" presents more than

TABLES FOR TWO



Peanut Butter & Co., 240 Sullivan St. (677-3995)—Most grownup indulgences tend to be a lot more expensive, not to mention destructive, than those favored by the clientele of this wholesome West Village fetish shop: the twenty-six-year-old proprietor Lee Zalben's sunny yellow kitchen is a chapel for peanut-butter pilgrims and sugar-loving masochists.

Daily-ground, homemade peanut butter—smooth or crunchy—is the foundation for Zalben's assortment of sandwiches, which range from the conservative lunchbox-special P.B. & J. to the unusual white-chocolate peanut butter with orange marmalade to the eccentric spicy Thai chicken sandwich with pineapple jam. The Fluffernutter (P.B. and Marshmallow Fluff) and the peanut butter B.L.T. are tops, but the menu's crown jewel is the decadent Elvis, a grilled P.B.-and-banana combo drizzled with honey which comes with or without bacon (it's better with).

The menu is loaded with references to kindergarten and Mom, which, in concert with the Fiesta Ware china and kitschy décor, encourage regression. One danger: what begins as a revisitation of childhood might immobilize some clean-plate rangers. Those who make it to dessert without a stomachache, though, can proceed to yogurt and peanut butter covered in Grape Nuts and honey, which, believe it or not, is a real palate-cleanser. At the other end of the spectrum is Death by Peanut Butter, a triple-dog-dare: three scoops of vanilla ice cream fortified by Captain Crunch and Reese's Pieces.

To drink, you can do no better than the P.B. & J. milkshake, but more refreshing is a glass of something from the milk bar: whole, low-fat, skim, organic, Lactaid, soy, or rice versions, served straight up or with chocolate, strawberry, or malt syrup (too much of it, frankly).

It all sounds super-caloric, sure, but remember that while peanut butter is more fattening than heavy cream it's packed with a higher content of protein, vitamins, and minerals than an equal amount of beef liver. So have at it, like the regulars, who seem to have no misgivings about paying six dollars for one of these gloppy monstrosities. (Open daily for lunch and dinner, and on weekends for late-night snacks. Sandwiches $4-$7.)

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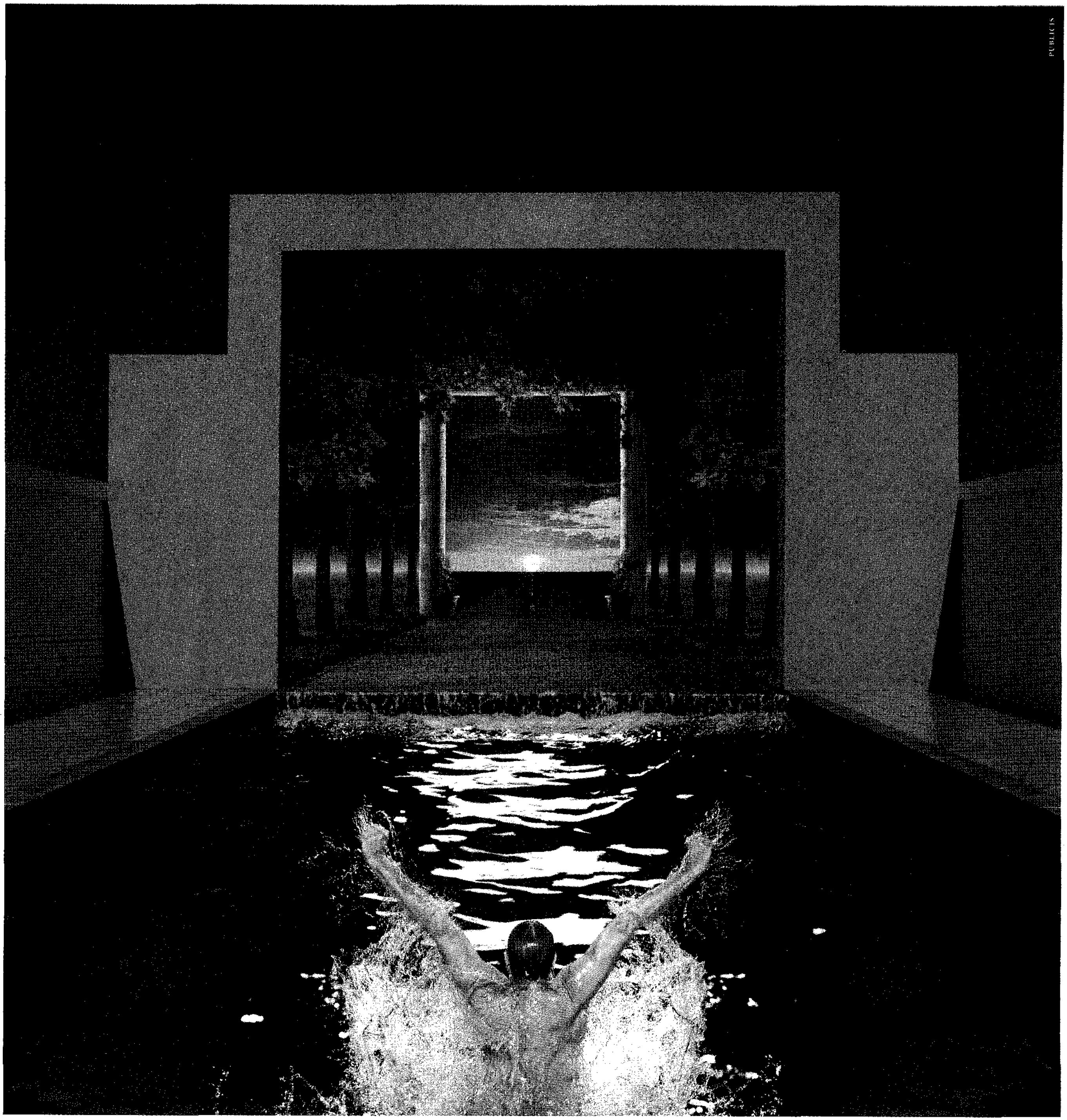

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a hundred and twenty-five images by this pioneer of photography, who recorded the vastness of the American West. Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ "Egyptian Art in the Age of the Pyramids," a sombre and ravishing survey of five hundred years of the millennia of Egyptian dynasties, covers the Old Kingdom (2650-2150 B.C.), the glorious formative period of Pharaonic art when the great pyramids were built and religious statuary rose to a refined naturalism. Through Jan. 9. . . . ¶ "Daido Moriyama: Hunter," an exhibition of forty photographs made in postwar Japan. Through Jan. 2. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

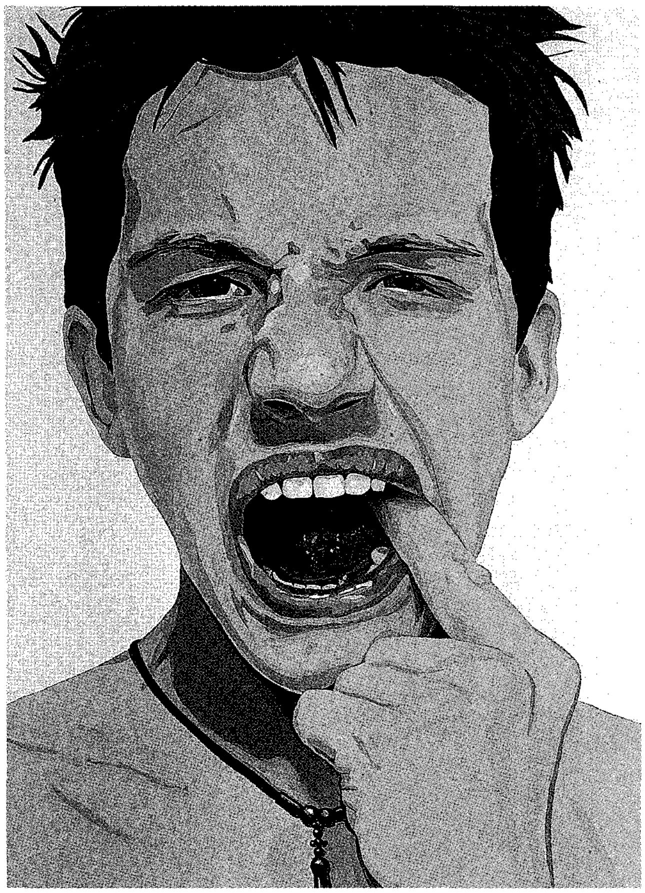
Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—The museum has begun its three-part blockbuster, "MOMA 2000," with "Modern Starts," which samples art from 1880 to 1920. Even this curatorial division is subdivided: the recently opened portion, "People," installed on the second floor, focusses on figurative work by Matisse, Picasso, Redon, Munch, Léger, and other colossi of early modernism. Neighboring floors will house "Places" (opening Oct. 28) and "Things" (Nov. 21). (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—A retrospective devoted to the Neapolitan painter Francesco Clemente presents more than two hundred paintings, frescoes, watercolors, pastels, sculptures, illustrations, and collaborative works. Through Jan. 9. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—The second half of America's mid-career retrospective, covering art from 1950 to now, is open, with a list of works that will supply fodder for art-world argument for the next few months and into the subsequent century. Through Feb. 13. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—"Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection." Refreshed by controversy, this sampling of advertising mogul Charles Saatchi's private collection looks energetic and diverse. Most of the forty artists project a jaunty cynicism, aiming for a quick, marketable impact, but only a handful of the works are truly impressive. "Ghost," Rachel Whiteread's plaster cast of the inside of a living room, is the sombre high point of the exhibition. Jenny Saville's gloriously obese painted self-portraits and Ron Mueck's leaner sculptural ones are exceptional in part for their relatively traditional (keep it quiet) virtuosity. And then there's Damien Hirst, whose dead animals in tanks seem almost quaintly existentialist. In the offensiveness department, Chris Ofili's "Holy Virgin Mary" is by no means the leading contender. Indeed, Ofili's tepid, psychedelic works are some of the most inert in the show; it's a pity the current battle couldn't have been waged over a more impressive work of art. Through Jan. 9. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. (288-0700)—"I have as usual made my escape," John Constable wrote to a friend about a recently completed landscape, "into the evanescence of the chiaroscuro." The painting in question, one of several foliage-framed views of Salisbury Cathedral he painted in the eighteen-twenties, delighted the Royal Academy. Constable's patron, the Bishop of Salisbury, however, was not happy: he wanted less chiaroscuro and more blue sky. The artist tried to oblige, but instead of retouching the original he painted a pair of nearly indistinguishable new versions, which have been united here thanks to a loan from the Met. Comparing them is a connoisseur's delight. The Frick's painting is more finished, the Met's more impulsive, but both look equally blustery. Around the tranquil needle of the cathedral's spire, bright wisps and flecks and graying cumuli prove what the Bishop should have known all along: Constable's heart was in the clouds. Through Dec. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)



"Joey Age 14 Las Vegas 1998," by Simon Henwood (Keenan).

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Philippe Favier—Tiny wood-and-glass cases lined with mordant death imagery. In a mixture of styles—a touch of James Ensor's ribaldry and Cornell's Surrealism, a bit of the high-spirited morbidity of José Guadalupe Posada's skull engravings—Favier draws and paints his scenes directly on the glass as well as on teal-colored paper lying inside. Skeletons ride bicycles, row boats, ski downhill, and skydive in a miniature danse macabre. The jewellike intensity of the boxes, which he calls "transparent core samples pulled out of a talkative glacier," is heightened by his delicate drawing hand. Through Oct. 23. (Helman, 20 W. 57th. 245-2888.)

Cisco Jimenez—An impolite exhibition of paintings, objects, and collaged drawings by a Mexican artist hellbent on ruffling feathers. Driven by cartoony lines in a sign painter's palette and violent, Tourette's-like eruptions of text, the paintings fetishize the female with an obsessiveness that seems borrowed from Catholic rite: fallopian tubes, ovaries, breasts, and even sinks, stoves, and a gynecologist's table bubble up from Jimenez's cauldron of images, often rising from retable-like structures. Textual passages include curses that raise the emotional temperature even higher. Funny and provocative. Through Oct. 23. (Associated American Artists, 20 W. 57th St. 399-5510.)

Short List—**JAMES BARSNESS,** Adams, 41 W. 57th St. 644-5665. Through Nov. 13. . . . **YURI KUPER,** Yoshii, 20 W. 57th St. 265-8876. Through Nov. 6. . . . **RUTH MARTEN,** Littlejohn, 41 E. 57th St. 980-2323. Through Nov. 6. . . . **TOM SACHS,** Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 752-2929. Through Oct. 25. . . . **SAUL STEINBERG,** Pace Wildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 421-3292. Through Oct. 30. . . . **FRANCISCA SUTIL,** Haime, 41 E. 57th St. 888-3550. Open Mondays; through Nov. 6.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Melissa Marks—Cartoonish drawings and a mural, all of which feature the artist's alter ego, an "aesthetically promiscuous" abstract form she calls Volitia. Looking like a cross between a bagel and an orchid (more anatomical similes come to mind as well), Volitia zooms through acrobatic maneuvers of many kinds: she breaks through barriers, dodges an army of blue molecules, and, in "Dogpile on Volitia," gamely suffers through an abstract version of a schoolyard ritual. Despite a formulaic drawing style, the spirit of these images is infectiously lively; would that all our inner selves were so rambunctious. Through Oct 23. (Klagsbrun, 526 W. 26th St. 243-3335.)

Short List—**FERNANDO CANOVAS,** Nosei, 530 W. 22nd St. 741-8695. Through Nov. 9. . . . **SOL LE WITT,** Cooper, 521 W. 21st St. 255-1105. Through Nov. 16. . . . **ELLIOTT PUCKETTE,** Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St. 563-4474. Through Nov. 6. . . . **DAVID SHAPIRO,** Liebman Magnan, 552 W. 24th St. 255-3225. Through Oct. 16.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Francesco Clemente—Six large spare frescoes, mostly painted in the early eighties, when the Neapolitan artist had just moved to Manhattan. Whether it was the demands of newfound celebrity or of the rapidly drying plaster, these dreamlike images look hastily done. The best of them, a contorted self-portrait (in red) and a ring of ecstatic naked dancers (in blue), evoke the extremes of self-doubt and orgiastic excitement which Clemente must have felt during those heady years. Through Nov. 6. (Blum, 99 Wooster St. 343-0441.)

Simon Henwood—Bigger than life gouaches of adolescents: awkward details (braces, zits) punctuate direct emotions (anguish, calm, incomprehension, anger). Though each portrait is excruciatingly individual, all are bathed in the same light: a harsh, age-appropriate glare. Opens Oct. 16. (Keenan, 3 Crosby St. 431-5083.)

Matej Andraz Vogrincic—For the Venice Biennale, this Slovenian artist dressed a centuries-old two-story house in a riot of used shirts and trousers. For his New York début, Vogrincic makes another "clothes sculpture," this time throwing shoes and

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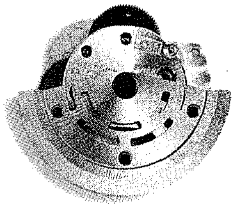

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handbags into the bargain. Each piece of clothing mounted on the bright-orange wall bears Vogrincic's "Casa Vestita: Venezia-New York" designer label. Taken as a whole, the wall-size ensemble seems at once conceptual and artsy-crafty—Christo goes to a yard sale. Through Oct. 30. (Gibson, 568 Broadway. 925-1192.)

"Mod"—A sprightly, way-cool group show, with twenty artists riffing on an energetically retro look. The artists celebrate the deliciously bad designs of the sixties and seventies. James Hyde offers "Entail," a soft vinyl beanbag-chair-like construction; Steve Mumford painted a groovy-colored ray-gunner car; Vik Muniz photographed violets made from wire hangers; Walter Robinson twirled off a spin painting. Best of all is a meticulous painted abstraction by Warren Isensee, appropriately titled with a palindrome, "Guru Rug." Through Oct. 23. (Collins, 83 Grand St. 226-1861.)

Short List—**ilan averbuch,** Hoffman, 429 West Broadway. 966-6676. Through Oct. 30. . . . **jean-michel basquiat,** Shafrazi, 119 Wooster St. 274-9300. Through Nov. 13. . . . **colin chase,** June Kelly, 591 Broadway. 226-1660. Through Nov. 2. . . . **alfred jensen,** Malca, 580 Broadway. 966-8854. Through Jan. 8.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Sotheby's—Oct. 13: Continental furniture and European works of art. . . . ¶ Oct. 14: Old Master paintings. . . . ¶ Oct. 15: Americana. . . . ¶ Oct. 19: An auction of silver; also a sale of moderately priced jewelry. . . . ¶ Oct. 20: Jewelry and couture. . . . ¶ Oct. 21: Still more jewelry, as well as a sale of English ceramics. . . . ¶ Oct. 22: English furniture. . . . ¶ Oct. 26: Watches. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Christie's—Oct. 14: American furniture and folk art. . . . ¶ Oct. 18-19: Jewelry, including property from the estate of Sybil B. Harrington. . . . ¶ Oct. 20: Watches; also an auction of silver, objects of virtu, and Russian art, including an important single-owner collection of Regency silver. . . . ¶ Oct. 21: English furniture. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000.) . . . At **christie's east:** Oct. 13: Books. . . . ¶ Oct. 14: Nineteenth-century decorative art. . . . ¶ Oct. 20: Jewelry. . . . ¶ Oct. 26: European decorative art. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400.)

New York Photography Fair—Forty dealers convene for the second year. (Puck Building, Lafayette St. at Houston St. Oct. 14-17. For information, call 777-5218.)

International Fine Art and Antique Dealers Show—A gathering of high-end dealers. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. Oct. 15-21, with a benefit preview on Oct. 14. For information, call 642-8572.)

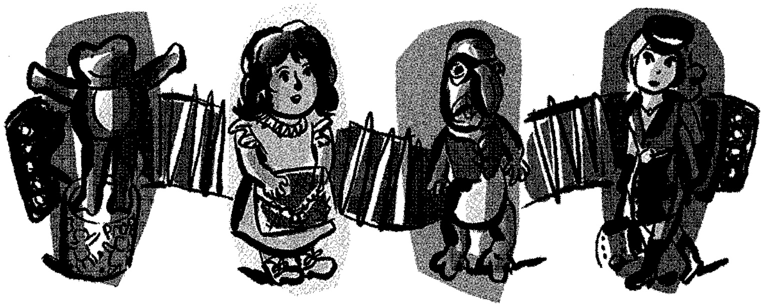
Gramercy Park Antiques and Textiles Show—A hundred exhibitors. (69th Regiment Armory, Lexington Ave. at 25th St. Oct. 15-17. For information, call 255-0020.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Richard Misrach—A blindingly beautiful suite of twenty-six medium- and large-scale color prints entitled "View from My Front Porch." Well, the artist's porch (at his home in the Berkeley hills) looks out over San Francisco Bay, and the photographs, each of the exact same view taken at different times of day, are filled with sublime banks of charcoal, cotton, or ochre clouds; tangerine, lemon, and rose sunsets; heavy black storm curtains and thick rays of white light. Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge sit under the sky in the middle of each picture, and it all could have felt like just another academic excercise, but it doesn't. Misrach here seems as if he's collaborating with nature on a hot and cool, thunderous and wispy jazz improvisation. Through Oct. 23. (Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St. 989-7600.)

ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Toy Story



DUPUY-BERBERIAN

By the time kids are two years old, their desires are fiercely felt. Plead and cajole all you like: you'll never dissuade them from Teletubbies and Furbies, Pokémon cards and Britney Spears dolls unless you're able to offer a seductive alternative.

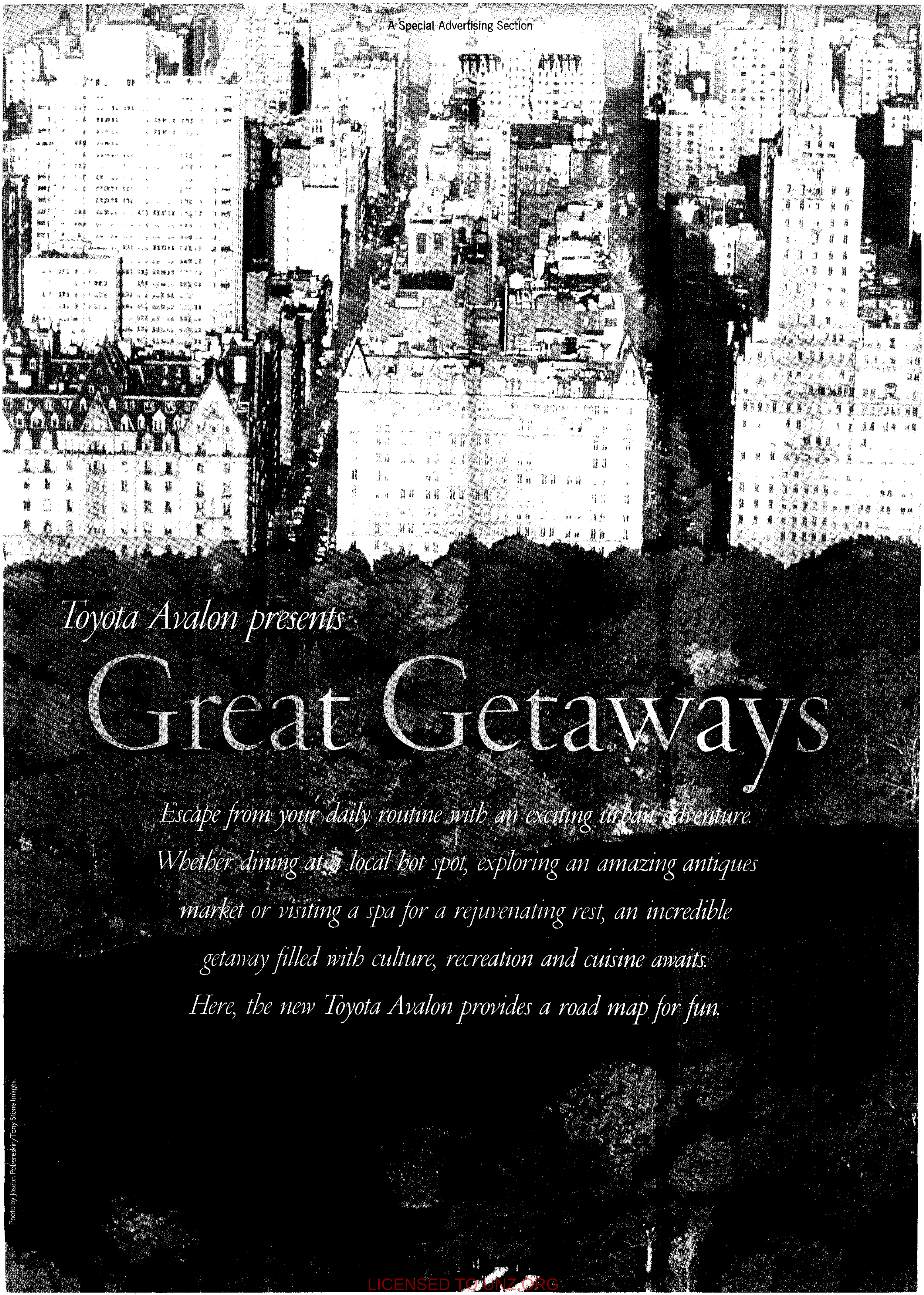
No doubt things weren't any different at the turn of the last century, when little girls longing for catapults and cowboy hats instead received the kind of porcelain doll that lives at **Iris Brown's Victorian Doll and Miniature Shoppe** (253 E. 57th St.; 593-2882), a dimly lit Dickensian hideaway on an otherwise nondescript midtown street. A humongous twenty-eight-inch young lady, by the long-defunct company Armand Marseille, has a bisque head, a luxuriant brunette human-hair coif, and expressive glass eyes; though her dress has faded to a yellow worthy of Miss Havisham, the years have not dimmed her piquant expression ($900). An equally fragile Art Deco damsel with a Louise Brooks bob isn't letting her abbreviated stature ruin her fun—she's as frisky as three and a half inches will allow ($200).

The ballerina ($25) inside the jewelry casket at **Geppetto's Toy Box** (10 Christopher St.; 620-7511) is altogether more demure than Iris Brown's diminutive Lulu. Once wound, she pirouettes to the strains of "Memory"—a far cry, no doubt, from the musical tastes of the fishnet-stockinged, leather-jacketed Harley-Davidson Madame Alexander doll ($150) hanging out in the showcase across the floor, who looks like she'd rather be listening to Limp Bizkit. (Despite her innocent moue, she probably offers the other toys Marlboros and swigs of Jack Daniels the minute the store closes.) Admittedly less graceful is a frog-in-the-box featuring an amphibian who doesn't merely pop up but careens across the room with a propulsive force guaranteed to induce glee even after a hundred thousand or so flights ($32).

Flight of a different sort is the specialty at **Big City Kites** (1210 Lexington Ave.; 472-2623), where the stock includes chili-pepper wind socks, multicolored bow-tie tails, and all manner of fluttery fliers, including silk Chinese kites that are handsome enough to serve as wall hangings. A dragon with a *jolie-laide* visage and an impressive wingspan is $24.

Dragons and other members of the animal kingdom, real or imagined, crowd the crooked catwalks of **The Enchanted Forest** (85 Mercer St.; 925-6677), a SoHo emporium that's not too stuck up to sell eyeball finger rings ($3), ear-splitting red plastic accordions (so popular with young shoppers that a salesclerk confessed that she fantasizes about taking them off the floor entirely; $28), and a hand puppet, with leatherette legs, antennae, and wings, that is supposed to be a cricket but is a dead ringer for a cockroach ($24).

If you believe that nothing could be more unpleasant than listening to non-stop toy-accordion music while being poked and prodded by a roach puppet you have not visited **Forbidden Planet** (840 Broadway; 473-1576), a huge store selling stuff that few adults, no matter how forward-thinking, could relish purchasing: a Chuckie doll with bloodied forehead ($29.99), a black-cloaked, chain-draped Ozzy Osbourne action figure that comes complete with headless bats and would probably send that Madame Alexander Harley girl straight back to Spence ($16.99), and a Norman Bates doll who is wearing a blue granny dress with men's brogues and is sold with a miniature knife and a gray plastic wig ($19.99). Should a cross-dressing homicidal maniac prove too much even for the tough little cookie you're buying for, there's also a snaggletoothed, pop-eyed stuffed Watto with bendable wings ($12.99). (According to the tag, he is a "devious Tatooine junk dealer" from "Star Wars: Episode I.") Devious he may be, but he probably wouldn't be averse to scaring away monsters lurking under the bed, and he might just tolerate a cuddle or two for a job well done.

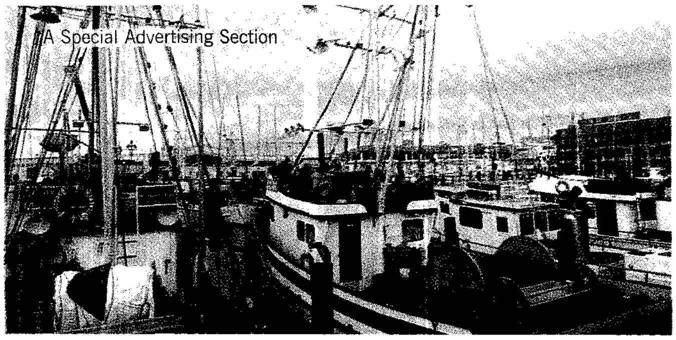


Toyota Avalon presents

Great Getaways

Escape from your daily routine with an exciting urban adventure. Whether dining at a local hot spot, exploring an amazing antiques market or visiting a spa for a rejuvenating rest, an incredible getaway filled with culture, recreation and cuisine awaits. Here, the new Toyota Avalon provides a road map for fun.

Photo by Joseph Pobereskin/Tony Stone Images.



San Francisco

Unbeatable Bookstore

City Lights Booksellers, 261 Columbus Ave., (415) 362-8193
The Beats go on at this legendary literary locale, opened by poet and Kerouac buddy Lawrence Ferlinghetti. The country's first all-paperback bookstore, it features the most impressive array of Beat literature around.

Relaxing Retreat

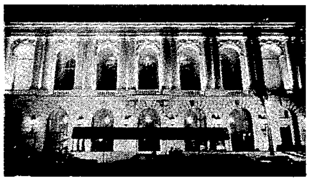
Sonoma Mission, 18300 Sonoma Hwy, (707) 938-9000
Voted "Best Resort/Spa in the World" the last three years by readers of *Gourmet*, this 200-room spa is famed for its thermal mineral treatments. Just over an hour's drive from the city, it offers Roman baths, herbal steam rooms and 60 traditional services such as reflexology, aromatherapy and mud wraps.

Bay Area Appetite

Farallon, 450 Post St., (415) 956-6969
Expensive. Go "under the sea" at this beautiful restaurant, named after the islands visible from the Golden Gate Bridge. It's decorated with sea-urchin and jellyfish chandeliers, and its seafood menu includes three different kinds of caviar.

Globe, 290 Pacific Ave., (415) 391-4132
Moderate. Rumor has it that local chefs dine at Globe, said to be the best California bistro in the city. Simple dishes are presented in a casual, chic setting that includes a curving zinc oyster bar.

House of Nanking, 919 Kearny St., (415) 421-1429
Inexpensive. This "hole in the wall" serves up the best food this side of China. Ask the brusque but efficient waitstaff to help you choose between the crispy sea bass with vegetables or a custom-made noodle dish.



Center Stage

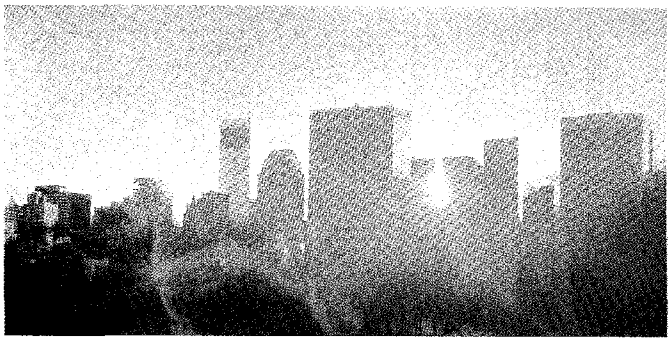
The San Francisco Opera,
301 Van Ness Ave., (415) 861-4008
Fall productions at this renowned, 76-year-old opera venue include *Lucia di Lammermoor* by Gaetano Donizetti and *Idomeneo* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Earthly Delights

Strybing Arboretum & Botanical Garden, Ninth Ave. (at Lincoln Way), (415) 661-5191
This 70-acre Garden of Eden in Golden Gate Park is a masterpiece of landscape design, overflowing with beautiful treasures including a duck pond, an arbor and a subtly placed statuary.

Where to Stay

Hilton San Francisco, 333 O'Farrell St., (415) 771-1400
With its five restaurants, a health club and one of the only outdoor pools in the city, visitors will find it difficult to tear themselves away from the Hilton San Francisco. The towers of this Union Square hotel offer unparalleled views of the city and the Bay.



New York

Shop Talk

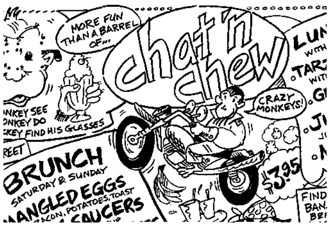
Paragon Sporting Goods, 867 Broadway, (212) 255-8036
Since its opening in 1908, millions of active visitors have passed through the doors of this Union Square sporting goods emporium, reveling in tennis racquets, team sport equipment, snowboards and in-line skates.

Portico Bed & Bath, 139 Spring St., (212) 941-7722
Minimalism is the mantra at this SoHo furnishings store. You'll find soft cotton sheets in a variety of muted shades, aromatherapy bath-and-body items to satisfy your skin and soul, and gorgeous wood beds and cabinets.

Big Apple Bites

Gramercy Tavern, 42 E. 20th St., (212) 477-0777
Expensive. Enjoy favorites such as tuna tartare at this neo-American tavern. Dining impresario Danny Meyer and chef Tom Colicchio pamper diners in a charming setting that's reminiscent of a Vermont lodge.

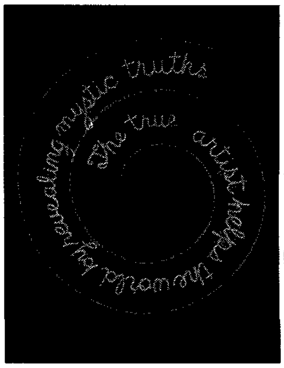
Carmine's, 200 W. 44th St., (212) 221-3800
Moderate. You'll cry "Mama Mia!" at the gargantuan plates of pasta that are par for the course at this "family-style" restaurant. Its bustling bar area and always-festive atmosphere make it a popular pre-theater destination.



Chat 'n Chew, 10 E. 16th St., (212) 243-1616
Inexpensive. Comfort yourself at this greasy spoon with stick-to-your-ribs favorites such as burgers, macaroni and cheese and chocolate shakes. Quirky waitresses, rustic surroundings and upbeat music add to the playfulness.

Museum Watch

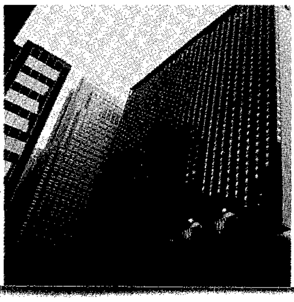
Whitney Museum of American Art, 945 Madison Ave., (212) 570-3676
The American Century: Art & Culture, Part II, 1950-2000
This comprehensive exhibit—consisting of more than 600 paintings, sculptures, photographs and prints—explores the evolution of the American identity in the last half century as seen through the eyes of the country's artists.


the true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths

Bruce Nauman, "The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths," 1967.

Broadway Stars

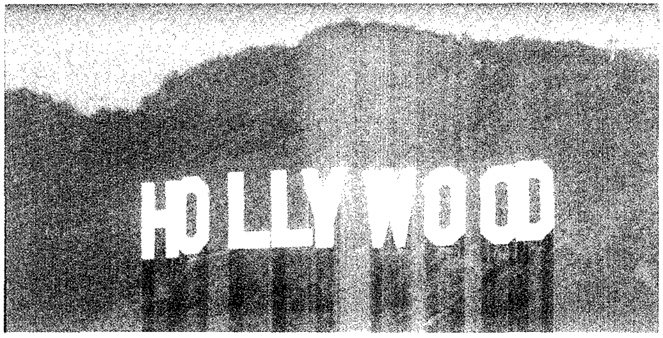
Putting It Together, Barrymore Theatre, 243 W. 47th Street, (212) 239-6200
Previews begin October 30; opening night, November 21
Veteran performer Carol Burnett returns to the Great White Way this fall in *Putting It Together*, a review featuring the music of beloved composer/lyricist Stephen Sondheim. Two-time Tony Award-winner George Hearn co-stars with the show-stopping redhead.



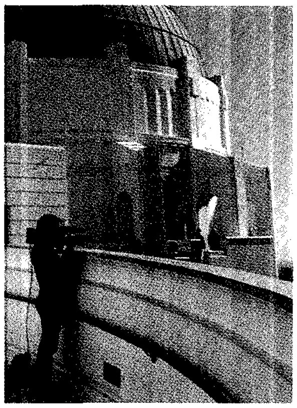
Where to Stay

Hilton New York, 1335 Ave. of the Americas, (212) 586-7000
Located in Midtown near Rockefeller Center, this 2,041-room hotel is within walking distance of many terrific attractions, such as Central Park, the Theater District and Fifth Avenue shopping.

Photos (clockwise from top left): Todd Rosenberg; 25mm/Photonica; illustration by Barry Shapiro; ©Bruce Nauman/ARS, New York, courtesy Sperone Westwater, New York; Hilton provided by Hilton Hotels; Saxon Holt; T. McCarthy/San Francisco Opera; © 1999 Frankie Frankeny; Lawrence Ferlinghetti.



Los Angeles



Panoramic View

[illegible]

Hop in your car and head to this 4,100-acre park in the Santa Monica Mountains, home to the L.A. Zoo, The Greek Theatre, golf courses, and bridle and hiking trails. The Griffith Observatory offers an outstanding view of L.A. and the famous Hollywood sign.

Healthy Hollywood

Erewhon Natural Foods, 7660 Beverly Blvd., (323) 937-0777

While perusing the excellent selection of organic veggies and vitamins at this health food utopia, you may also catch a glimpse of the next Leo or Gwyneth, lounging around the juice bar.

Celebrity Style

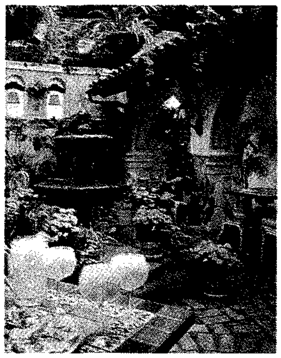
Anthropologie, 320 N. Beverly Dr., (310) 385-7390

Movie industry insiders find everything from antique pottery to Indian-inspired dresses at this popular store. The keen buying staff saves you a trip by hand-picking the best items from European, Asian and American antiques markets.

All-Star Dining

Le Colonial, 8783 Beverly Blvd., (310) 289-0660

Expensive. Grab a few friends and (if you can) a table on the exotic patio of this hip Vietnamese hangout. It's the ideal destination for people-watching, cocktail sipping and glitterati gawking. The food's pretty amazing, too.



El Cholo, 1025 Wilshire Blvd., (310) 899-1106

Moderate. You'll go "loco" for what many consider the best Mexican food in the city. Enjoy delectable specialties such as guacamole and margaritas at great prices.

Art's Deli, 12224 Ventura Blvd.; (818) 762-1221

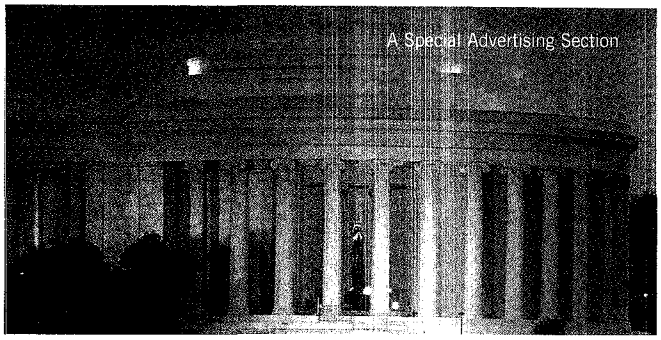
Inexpensive. This Studio City deli—near L.A.'s "sitcom factory"—is always filled with TV writers, munching on gigantic pastrami sandwiches while jotting down jokes on napkins.

Where to Stay

The Hilton Beverly Hills, 9876 Wilshire Blvd., (310) 274-7777

The Beverly Hilton is a regular host to big celebs and big-name events, including the Golden Globe Awards. Moguls and movie stars lounge around its AquaStar Pool, popular for power breakfasts and luncheons.

Photos (clockwise from top left): L.A. City Dept. of Rec and Parks; Will and Dani McIntyre/ Tony Stone Images; Matthew Barney, collection of Thea Westreich and Ethan Wagner; 1789 by Mark Weiland; Hilton provided by Hilton Hotels; El Cholo; Anthropologie: L.A. City Dept. of Rec. and Parks.



Washington D.C.

Worldly Goods

Eastern Market, 7th St. SE (at C Street)

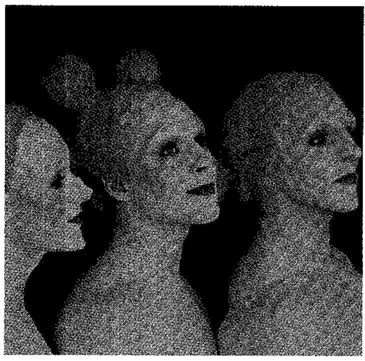
This Capitol Hill market is a commercial centerpiece showcasing arts, crafts and cuisines of the many cultures that converge in D.C. On Saturdays, African pottery, South American sweaters and Eastern-inspired silver jewelry share space with fresh flowers, fruits and vegetables.

Mod Museum

Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Independence Ave. (at 7th Street), (202) 357-2700

Regarding Beauty: A View of the Late Twentieth Century

This often-provocative repository houses an exhibit of 88 pieces by 36 artists—including Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol and Louise Bourgeois—that question, comment on or reconsider beauty.



Matthew Barney, CR4 Faeriefield, 1994 (detail).

History Lessons

Mount Vernon, southern end of George Washington Pkwy., (703) 780-2000

Only 16 miles south of the city, this historic destination is within an easy drive of D.C. Once home to George Washington, it boasts stately, historic rooms and exotic gardens. Take a hike on the grounds' pristine quarter-mile trail that leads past Washington's cobble quarry. Open everyday of the year.

Capital Cuisine

1789, 1226 36th St. NW, (202) 965-1789

Expensive. Situated in a romantic, Federal-style townhouse in residential Georgetown, this American restaurant is a favorite for its beautiful décor and excellent food by renowned chef Ris Lacoste.

Pizzeria Paradiso, 2029 P St. NW, (202) 223-1245

Moderate. Climb a stairway to this slice of pizza heaven, located on the second floor of a Dupont Circle building. Each pie is made of fresh ingredients, cooked to perfection in a wood-burning oven until its crust is crispy.

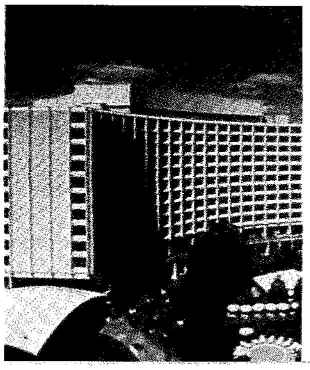
Luna Grill and Diner, 1301 Connecticut Ave. NW, (202) 835-2280

Inexpensive. City politicos campaign for a table at their favorite diner, which also scores with journalists hungry for more than a juicy story. Don't miss the Eggplant Parmigiano sub and a "daily green plate special" for vegetarians.

Where to Stay

Hilton Washington, 1919 Connecticut Ave., (202) 483-3000

Get pampered at this landmark 1,118-room hotel, featuring a fully staffed health spa offering sauna, massage and other spa treatments. Its unique shape, dramatic garden spreading across seven acres, hillside location and numerous service awards add up to a first-rate hotel experience.



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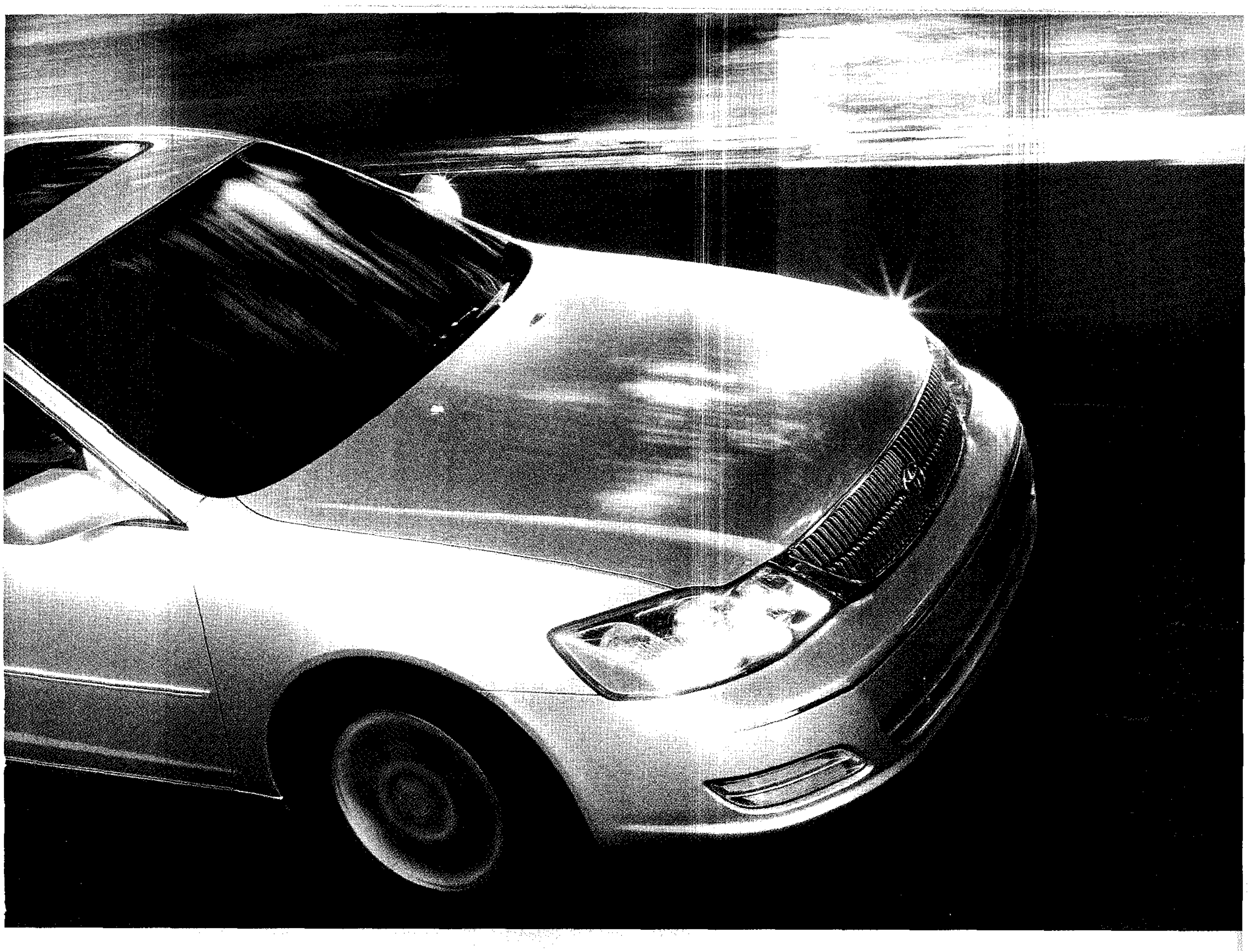

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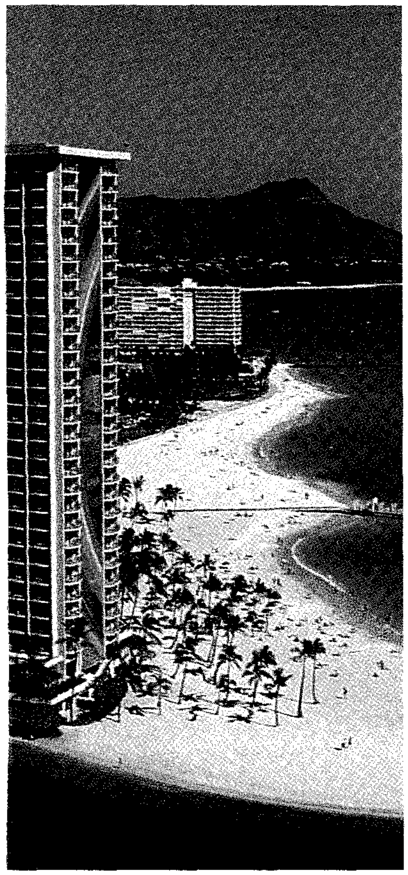
Owning the new Avalon is a rewarding experience. In more ways than one.

Avalon is the most luxurious, spacious sedan Toyota has ever created. But while it could be said that driving the Avalon is its own reward... we'd like to go a bit farther. How far? To wherever there's a fine Hilton Hotel. Or an exciting Princess Cruise. Now, being a new Avalon owner brings you a variety of rewards and travel benefits from Hilton Hotels and Princess Cruises.



Hilton HHonors® Membership

HHonors, Hilton's award-winning guest reward program, allows frequent travelers to take advantage of travel upgrades and benefits around the world.

Purchase a new Toyota Avalon and Toyota will send you an enrollment packet that invites you to join the HHonors program (if you do not receive an enrollment packet, please call 1 800 GO TOYOTA). After submitting your completed enrollment form, you will receive your Hilton HHonors Blue level membership credentials. In addition, 10,000 HHonors bonus points will be deposited to your account, compliments of Toyota. You'll also receive a special travel certificate from Princess Cruises. HHonors points can be redeemed for discounted or free Hilton hotel stays, airline tickets, cruises, specialty merchandise and foods. Blue level membership in HHonors entitles you to special recognition and benefits during your stays at any of more than 450 participating Hilton and Conrad International hotels. This includes: an HHonors-only reservation number, expedited check-in, free weekday newspapers delivered to your guest room, the services of an HHonors Guest Manager to ensure your stay is as comfortable and productive as possible, late check-out upon request, express check-out and Guaranteed Hospitality® customer service. You'll also receive a "Fast Track" offer to earn HHonors VIP status, providing access to room upgrades, health club privileges, additional bonus points and more.

Existing Hilton HHonors members who purchase a Toyota Avalon will also receive 10,000 HHonors bonus points to add to their existing total, and a special travel certificate from Princess Cruises. HHonors members who have accrued enough HHonors points may redeem them for vacation packages and cruise rewards. A sample of these include:

The Hilton Hawaiian Village®

The Hilton Hawaiian Village has long been considered the most popular resort hotel on Waikiki, and is available to you as an HHonors reward destination. Upon arrival at this distinctive hotel, you'll be surrounded by dazzling views of Diamond Head and the Pacific Ocean, non-stop shopping, dining and entertainment, as well as the most sensuous landscaping of any hotel on Oahu. Plus, you'll enjoy the hospitality extended by the professional, courteous staff. At the Hilton Hawaiian Village, you'll find your island vacation is a dream come true.

Princess Cruises

Toyota Avalon owners can also redeem HHonors points to select exciting vacations on Princess Cruises. Each ship offers an endless variety of dining and entertainment options—day and night. The unique design of the Princess Grand Class cruise combines big ship choice with small ship intimacy. Enjoy up to eight dining locations (including a 24-hour restaurant and room service), as many as three exciting shows nightly, and more staterooms with private balconies than any other cruise line. The freedom to do what you want, when you want—only from Princess.

And when you purchase a new Avalon, you'll receive a special travel certificate from Princess Cruises entitling you to a free, two-category upgrade on a Princess Grand Class Gulf of Alaska 2000 cruise, or a free three-category upgrade on a Princess Grand Class Gulf of Alaska 2000 cruisetour.

Hilton™ TOYOTA PRINCESS CRUISES

Membership in Hilton HHonors program begins upon completion and submission of enrollment forms. An enrollment packet will be forwarded approximately 60 days after vehicle purchase or lease date. Offer available only for new Toyota Avalon vehicles purchased or leased between October 1, 1999 and January 15, 2000. Date of purchase and/or lease date shall be deemed the date of the sale or lease document. This benefit is non-transferable and cannot be substituted for its cash value. Recipient is responsible for any taxes associated with receipt of this benefit. HHonors membership, earning and redemption of points are subject to HHonors Terms and Conditions. Princess Cruises' offer subject to Princess Cruises' Terms and Conditions.

GROUP SHOW—New work by Lawrence Beck (black-and-white photographs of tulips), Elger Esser (color landscapes), and Hiroshi Sugimoto (movie-house interiors). Through Oct. 30. (Sonnabend, 420 West Broadway. 966-6160.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY MIDTOWN—"Bill Brandt: A Retrospective." Through Oct. 31.(Sixth Ave. at 43rd St. 860-1777. Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10 to 5; Fridays, 10 to 8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10 to 6.)

SHORT LIST—**MICHAEL ACKERMAN,** Bodell, 13 E. 7th St. 477-1820. Open Tuesdays through Sundays, noon to 7; through Nov. 30. . . . **DAVID ARMSTRONG,** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 243-0200. Through Nov. 6. . . . **ADAM FUSS,** Cheim & Read, 521 W. 23rd St. 242-7727. Through Oct. 16. . . . **LUIGI GHIRRI,** Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747. Through Nov. 24. . . . **SAMUEL GOTTSCHO,** Alan Klotz/Photocollect, 22 E. 72nd St. 327-2211. Closed Tuesdays; through Oct. 23. . . . **MIMMO JODICE,** Burden, 20 E. 23rd St. 505-5555. Through Nov. 6. . . . **DAVID MALIN,** Schickler, 560 Broadway. 431-6363. Through Nov. 6. . . . **SALLY MANN,** Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 750-7070. Through Nov. 6. . . . **CONSTANTINE MANOS,** Leica, 670 Broadway. 777-3051. Opens Saturdays at noon; through Oct. 23. . . . **DAIDO MORIYAMA** and **REAGAN LOUIE,** Laurence Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930. Both shows through Oct. 30. . . . **MARK MORRISROE,** Hearn, 530 W. 22nd St. 727-7366. Through Oct. 31. . . . **NICHOLAS NIXON,** Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. 752-1223. Through Nov. 20. . . . **JOHN PFAHL,** Borden, 560 Broadway. 431-0166. Through Oct. 23. . . . **JOHN RIDDY,** Markey, 55 Vandam St. 627-4446. Through Oct. 23. . . . **ALISON ROSSITER,** Morthland, 225 Tenth Ave., at 23rd St. 242-7767. Through Oct. 16. . . . **JOSE MARIA SERT,** Barefoot, 580 Broadway. 625-8899. Closed Tuesdays; through Dec. 4. . . . **MIKE SMITH** and **MARK STEINMETZ,** Richardson, 560 Broadway. 343-1255. Both shows through Nov. 20. . . . **JACK SPENCER,** Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. 517-3766. Through Oct. 23. . . . **ANDRÉ STEINER,** Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292. Through Oct. 23. . . . **DAN WINTERS,** SABA, 116 E. 16th St. 477-7722. Open Mondays, closed Saturdays; through Oct. 22.

(See the museum listings for a photography exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum.)

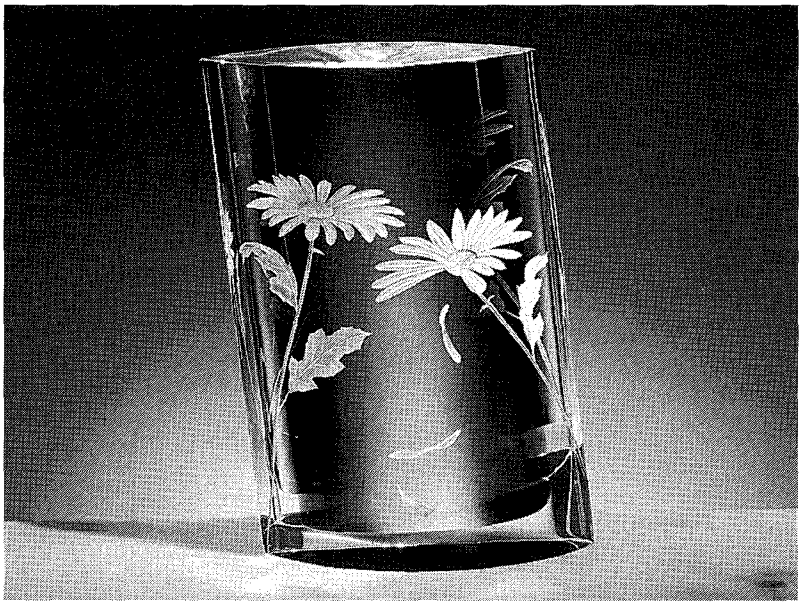
CLASSICAL MUSIC

(The box-office number for Alice Tully Hall is 875-5050; for Avery Fisher Hall, 875-5030; for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall, 247-7800; and for the 92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St., 996-1100.)

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA—**LUCIA DI LAMMERMOOR,** with Andrea Rost, Frank Lopardo, and Roberto Frontali; conducted by Charles Mackerras. (Oct. 13 at 7:30 and Oct. 16 at 1:30.) . . . **TOSCA,** with Elizabeth Holleque, Luciano Pavarotti, and Juan Pons; Daniel Oren. (Oct. 14 at 7:30 and Oct. 18 and Oct. 22 at 8.) . . . **AIDA,** with Deborah Voigt, Olga Borodina, Fabio Armiliato, and Nikolai Putilin; Carlo Rizzi. (Oct. 15 at 8 and Oct. 20 at 7:30.) . . . With Richard Margison instead of Mr. Armiliato. (Oct. 23 at 8 and Oct. 26 at 7:30.) . . . A double bill of **CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA,** with Dolora Zajick, Dennis O'Neill, and Paolo Gavanelli, and **PAGLIACCI,** with Veronica Villarroel, Plácido Domingo, Mr. Pons, and Mark Oswald; Mr. Rizzi. (Oct. 16 and Oct. 19 at 8 and Oct. 23 at 1.) . . . **LE NOZZE DI FIGARO,** with Hei-Kyung Hong, Rebecca Evans, Susan Graham, Dwayne Croft, and Ferruccio Furlanetto; Edo de Waart. (Oct. 21 at 8 and Oct. 25 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA—Oct. 13 and Oct. 19 at 7:30; Oct. 16 and Oct. 24 at 1:30; and Oct. 22 at 8: "Carmen." . . . ¶ Oct. 14 at 7:30 and Oct. 16 at 8: Handel's "Ariodante." . . .



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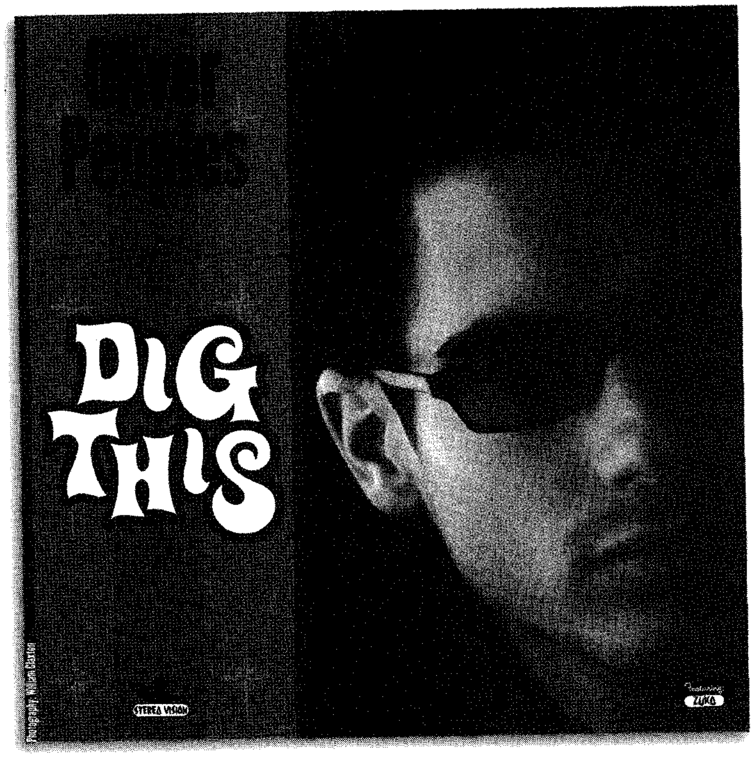

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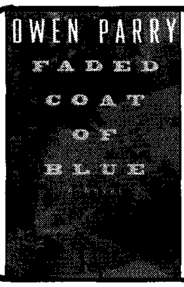
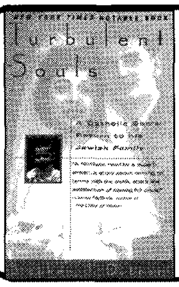
OCTOBER 11. COLUMBUS DAY

THERE ARE STILL PLENTY OF NEW WORLDS WORTH DISCOVERING IN A BOOKSTORE.



A FADED COAT OF BLUE A Novel
Owen Parry
In this series debut set against the background of the Civil War, Abel Jones searches for the killer of a Union officer and becomes tangled in a web of sinister relationships and shocking secrets.
"Ingeniously authoritative . . . a feast of fine language."
—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

Hyssop
Kevin McIlvoy
A grifter with a heart of gold, Red Greet has spent many of his 87 years behind bars. But the love and larceny he's seen outside them is the heart of this acclaimed novel of recollection and redemption.
"Smart, tough-minded, funny, beautiful."
—Richard Russo, author of *Straight Man*



Turbulent Souls
A Catholic Son's Return to his Jewish Family
Stephen J. Dubner
From the *New York Times Magazine* writer comes a personal and heartfelt account of the discovery that took him around the world and into a family heritage he'd nearly lost.
"A fantastic read by a superb writer."
—James McBride, author of *The Color of Water*

BARD
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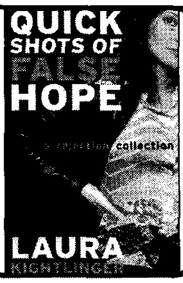
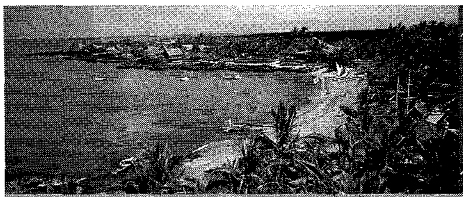
Quick Shots of False Hope
A Rejection Collection
Laura Kightlinger
Nobody can turn life's bitter rejections into positively hilarious riffs like stand-up performer Laura Kightlinger. Now, the sharp-witted comedienne offers up 17 bitingly funny tales of how "no" really does mean "no"—sometimes.





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¶ Oct. 15 and Oct. 23 at 8, Oct. 17 at 1:30, and Oct. 21 at 7:30: "La Bohème." . . . ¶ Oct. 23 at 1:30: "Madama Butterfly." . . . ¶ Oct. 26 at 7:30: "Falstaff." (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

"SONGS AND STORIES FROM MOBY DICK"—A Melville-derived performance-art piece created and performed by Laurie Anderson. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Oct. 13-16 at 7:30.)

"OPERATION: ORFEO"—A theatrical "conception" by Kirsten Dehlholm, with music by Gluck, Cage, and Bo Holten (who conducts the Musica Ficta and Ars Nova ensembles). (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Oct. 20 and Oct. 22-23 at 7:30.)

OPERA ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK—The French soprano Annick Massis and the Bulgarian mezzo-soprano Vesselina Kasarova head the cast of Bellini's "I Capuleti e i Montecchi," conducted by Eve Queler. (Avery Fisher Hall. Oct. 25 at 8.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC—At Avery Fisher Hall. Oct. 14 and Oct. 16 at 8, Oct. 15 at 11 A.M., and Oct. 19 at 7:30: André Previn conducts his own Piano Concerto (with Horacio Gutierrez as soloist), in addition to Brahms's "Variations on a Theme by Haydn" and Elgar's "Enigma" Variations. . . . ¶ Oct. 16 at 2: Mr. Previn oversees a Young People's Concert. . . . ¶ Oct. 21 and Oct. 23 at 8, Oct. 22 at 2, and Oct. 26 at 7:30: Christian Thielemann conducts Wagner's "Siegfried Idyll," Bruch's G-Minor Violin Concerto (featuring the orchestra's concertmaster, Glenn Dicterow), and Schumann's Symphony No. 1 (the "Spring"). (875-5030.)

TALLIS SCHOLARS—Peter Phillips directs his a-cappella group in a pair of concerts that feature works that use as a cantus firmus the Franco-Flemish secular song "L'Homme Armé," a popular inspiration for early- and mid-Renaissance composers. Oct. 14 at 8: Josquin's "L'Homme Armé" Mass (in five parts) and works by Antoine Brumel, Clemens non Papa, Nicholas Gombert, and Giaches de Wert. . . . ¶ Oct. 17 at 4: Palestrina's "L'Homme Armé" Mass (in five parts) and motets by Carlo Gesualdo and Orlando di Lasso. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. For information about tickets, call 800-627-0655.)

AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA—The group opens its season with a concert of music inspired by the creepy tales of Edgar Allan Poe, who died a hundred and fifty years ago this month. Leon Botstein conducts Florent Schmitt's "Le Palais Hanté," André Caplet's "Conte Fantastique" (based on "The Masque of the Red Death"), Einojuhani Rautavaara's "On the Last Frontier" (set to a text from Poe's "The Narrative of A. Gordon Pym"), and Rachmaninoff's "The Bells." (Avery Fisher Hall. Oct. 15 at 8.)

NEW JERSEY PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE—Twenty-four musicians striking, thumping, rubbing, scraping, and crashing things, in a performance of Charles Wuorinen's "Percussion Symphony." (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. Oct. 16 at 7:30. For information about tickets, call 279-4200.)

ORCHESTRE SYMPHONIQUE DE MONTRÉAL—At Carnegie Hall, Charles Dutoit conducting. Oct. 16 at 8: Beethoven's "Fidelio" Overture, Dallapiccola's "Il Prigioniero," and Fauré's Requiem, with soprano Phyllis Bryn-Julson, tenor Howard Haskin, baritone David Pittman-Jennings, and the orchestra's own chorus. . . . ¶ Oct. 17 at 2: Szymanowski's "Stabat Mater" and a concert version of his opera "King Roger."

PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA—Wolfgang Sawallisch conducts Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 (featuring Ivo Pogorelich) and Shostakovich's Symphony No. 14. (Carnegie Hall. Oct. 19 at 8.)

What in the world?

zulu baskets
tibetan coats
lombok pottery
masai jewelry
russian tea sets
ashanti carvings
czech glass
thai puppets
haitian mirrors
nicaraguan hammocks
ethiopian mezuzahs
venetian perfume bottles
american shaker boxes
rajasthani pillows
central asian rugs
moroccan lanterns

Hornbill Man
This half-bird, half-human figure was made by a Lobi artisan from Burkina Faso. In West African art, the hornbill usually symbolizes fidelity or fertility.

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Sacred Music in a Sacred Space—The series' season opens with Handel's oratorio "Solomon," with Kent Tritle directing. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 288-2520. Oct. 20 at 7:30.)

Riverside Symphony—George Rothman leads music by Copland, Delius, and Schubert. (Alice Tully Hall. Oct. 20 at 8.)

"PoulencPlus!"—A festival of twelve events (continuing through Dec. 12) to celebrate the centennial of the most genial of French composers. Oct. 21 at 6:30: The first public screening of the 1957 NBC Opera Theater production of "Dialogues of the Carmelites," featuring Leontyne Price and Elaine Malbin. (Museum of Television and Radio, 25 W. 52nd St. 621-6600.) . . . ¶ Oct. 23 at 8: The Eos Orchestra, conducted by Jonathan Sheffer, performs the Piano Concerto No. 1 (with Pascal Rogé) and Concerto for Two Pianos (with Mr. Rogé and Vanessa Benelli), among other works. (92nd Street Y.) . . . ¶ Oct. 24 at 3: Longtime Poulenc associate Dalton Baldwin presides at the piano for a recital of the composer's songs, with soprano Norah Ansellem, tenor Michel Sénéchal, and baritone Leon Williams. (92nd Street Y.)

New York Collegium—Fabio Biondi leads the period-instrument group in Pergolesi's only oratorio, "La Morte di San Giuseppe." (Church of St. Vincent Ferrer, 869 Lexington Ave., at 66th St. Oct. 22 at 8. For information about tickets, call 717-9246.)

Ensemble Doulce Mémoire—The French early-music group, directed by Denis Raisin-Dadre, offers two programs. Oct. 23 at 8: Carnival songs from Renaissance Florence. (Ethical Culture Society, 2 W. 64th St. For information about tickets, call 800-627-0655.) . . . ¶ Oct. 25 at 8: Renaissance songs and dances from the court of Francis I. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160.)

Berlin Philharmonic—At Carnegie Hall, Claudio Abbado conducting. Oct. 24: Nono's Suite from "Prometeo" and Mahler's Symphony No. 9. . . . ¶ Oct. 25: Four of Mahler's "Rückert Lieder" (with contralto Anna Larsson) and Bruckner's Symphony No. 9. . . . ¶ Oct. 26: Schumann's Piano Concerto (featuring Maurizio Pollini) and Schoenberg's "Pelleas und Melisande." (Evenings at 8.)

RECITALS

Music at the Morgan—Two programs at the Morgan Library. Oct. 13 at 6:30: Pianist Anton Kuerti and colleagues perform pieces from the library's collection, by Beethoven, Schumann, and others. . . . ¶ Oct. 17 at 4: A joint recital by soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian and baritone Richard Stilwell, with pianist Craig Rutenberg. (29 E. 36th St. 685-0008, ext. 347.)

Tokyo String Quartet—The foursome, which enters the season with a new cellist, plays quartets by Beethoven (in D Major, Op. 18, No. 3), Ravel, and Shostakovich (his Ninth). (92nd Street Y. Oct. 14 at 8.)

New York Festival of Song—Presenting music by Kurt Weill and several of his contemporaries from Berlin in the years of the Weimar Republic. (Kaye Playhouse, Hunter College, Park Ave. at 68th St., 772-4448. Oct. 14 at 8.)

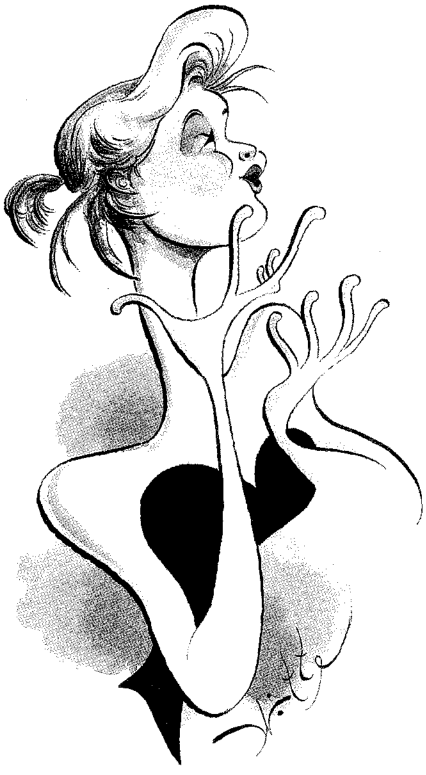
Marilyn Nonken—The pianist offers works by David Rakowski, Milton Babbitt (including the première of his "Allegro Penseroso"), Martin Butler, and Jeff Nichols (also a première). (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. Oct. 14 at 8.)

Yo-Yo Ma—Playing unaccompanied cello works by Mark O'Connor, Bright Sheng, David Wilde, and Kodály. (Carnegie Hall. Oct. 15 at 7:30.)

Beaux Arts Trio—The ensemble launches a yearlong Beethoven cycle by performing his Piano Trios in E-Flat Major (Op. 1, No. 1), B-Flat Major (Op. 11), E-Flat Major (WoO 38), and D Major (Op. 70, the "Ghost"). (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Oct. 15-16 at 8.)

Celebrating Chopin—On October 17, 1849, the musical world wept at the passing of Frédéric Chopin. "However lamented he may be by all artists and persons who knew him, we doubt that the time has yet come for him (so deeply mourned and fully appreciated) to hold the high position of universal regard that the future likely reserves for him," Franz Liszt eulogized, and time has proved him right. Exactly a hundred and fifty years later, New York's concert halls will be filled with his music. Here's a selective guide. At 11 A.M.: A Mass for Chopin. (Church of the Holy Trinity, 316 E. 88th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ At 3:30: A three-hour Chopin marathon by **PAULETTE HIOS**, comprising préludes, études, nocturnes, mazurkas, a polonaise, the Berceuse, and the Four Ballades. (Belanthi gallery, 142 Court St., Brooklyn. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ At 8: The French pianist **CYPRIEN KATSARIS** offers an all-Chopin concert that includes the B-Minor Sonata and—understandably—the "Funeral March." (Carnegie Hall.) . . . ¶ Also at 8: Tributes and performances by two dozen pianists, including **STEPHEN HOUGH, GRANT JOHANNESEN, JEROME LOWENTHAL, GARRICK OHLSSON,** and **GUSTAVO ROMERO,** who join hosts Tony Randall, David Dubal, and Billy Joel, who—brace yourself—has written an homage to Chopin for the occasion. (Alice Tully Hall.)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center—Oct. 17 at 5 and Oct. 19 at 7:30: An all-Mozart program in which violinist Joseph Silverstein and pianist Lee Luvisi perform his A-Major Violin Sonata (K. 526), and colleagues Paul Neubauer (viola) and Fred Sherry (cello) join them for the E-Major Piano Trio (K. 542) and E-Flat-Major Divertimento for Strings (K. 563). (Alice Tully Hall.) . . . ¶ Oct. 21 at 6:45 and 8:30: An opportunity to hear two go-rounds of works by Chester Biscardi, Bun-Ching Lam, and Robert Maggio. (Rose Rehearsal Studio, Rose Building, Lincoln Center. For information about tickets, call 875-5788.) . . . ¶ Oct. 22 at 8 and Oct. 24 at 5: Mozart's Oboe Quartet, Frank Bridge's Piano Quintet, and Tchaikovsky's String Quartet No. 1 (played by the Vermeer String Quartet). (Alice Tully Hall.)



Mezzo-soprano Vesselina Kasarova, with the Opera Orchestra of New York.

MICHAEL WITTE

Kiri Te Kanawa—The soprano, with pianist Warren Jones, performs songs by Mendelssohn, Duparc, Liszt, Guastavino, and others. (Carnegie Hall. Oct. 18 at 7:30.)

Lisa Saffer—Soprano, with pianist Judith Gordon, in a recital that includes Messiaen's "Chants de Terre et de Ciel," Strauss's "Mädchenblumen," and other works. (Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center. Oct. 18 at 7:30. For information about tickets, call 875-5050.)

Maurizio Pollini and the Juilliard String Quartet—This joint recital includes piano works by Beethoven, Schoenberg, and Chopin, in addition to chamber pieces by Webern and Stravinsky. (Carnegie Hall. Oct. 20 at 8.)

Jeffrey Siegel—The pianist includes in his lecture-recital an unpublished work by Leonard Bernstein, "Meditation on a Wedding"; its subtitle, "for the Russells, R&J," refers to the art critic John Russell and his wife, the lecturer Rosamond Bernier, for whom it was written, in 1975. (92nd Street Y. Oct. 20 at 8.)

Robert Taub—The pianist performs Beethoven's Sonatas in F Minor (Op. 2, No. 1), E-Flat Major (Op. 27, No. 1), F-Sharp Major (Op. 78), and C Major (Op. 53, the "Waldstein"). (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. Oct. 20 at 8.)

Ursula Oppens—Performing John Adams's "Phrygian Gates," in addition to Beethoven's Sonatas in G Major (Op. 49, No. 2), D Major (Op. 28), A-Flat Major (Op. 26), and C Major (Op. 53, the "Waldstein"). (Great Hall, Cooper Union, Third Ave. at 7th St. Oct. 21 at 7:30. For information about tickets, call 279-4200.)

Fazil Say—The Turkish pianist, a rising star in the keyboard world, performs Bach's "Italian" Concerto, Mozart's A-Major Sonata (K. 331), Debussy's "La Cathédrale Engloutie," and Liszt's B-Minor Sonata. (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. Oct. 21 at 8.)

Midori—The violinist is joined by pianist Robert McDonald for sonatas by Mozart (in A Major, K. 526), Corigliano, and Franck, in addition to Schoenberg's "Phantasy." (Carnegie Hall. Oct. 22 at 7:30.)

Bradley Brookshire—The harpsichordist offers toccatas and partitas by Bach. (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. Oct. 23 at 2.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Readings—Oct. 17 at 5: By Junot Díaz, Yusef Komunyakaa, and Suzan-Lori Parks, from their contributions to the literary journal *Callaloo*. (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 539-8685.) . . . ¶ Oct. 21 at 7: By poet Ciaran Carson. (Glucksman Ireland House, New York University, 1 Washington Mews. 998-3950.) . . . ¶ Oct. 21 at 7: By Dava Sobel, from her novel "Galileo's Daughter." (Three Lives & Company, 154 W. 10th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ Oct. 22 at 7: By poets Lucille Clifton and Galway Kinnell. (Dia Center for the Arts, 548 W. 22nd St. 989-5566.)

Talks—Oct. 14 at 6:30: Forum gallery director Robert Fishko speculates with artist William Beckman about the art of the twenty-first century. (Doyle, 175 E. 87th St. 427-2730.) . . . ¶ Oct. 14 at 7: Writer Peter Mayle discusses his latest adventures in the south of France. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160.) . . . ¶ Oct. 25 at 8: Jerry Hopkins, author of "Strange Foods: Bush Meat, Bats, and Butterflies—an Epicurean Adventure Around the World," talks about what he likes to eat on his travels. (Explorers Club, 46 E. 70th St. 628-8383.)

Walk—Oct. 23 at 2: The Fraunces Tavern Museum offers a guided tour of the burial grounds of lower Manhattan. For more information, call 425-1778.

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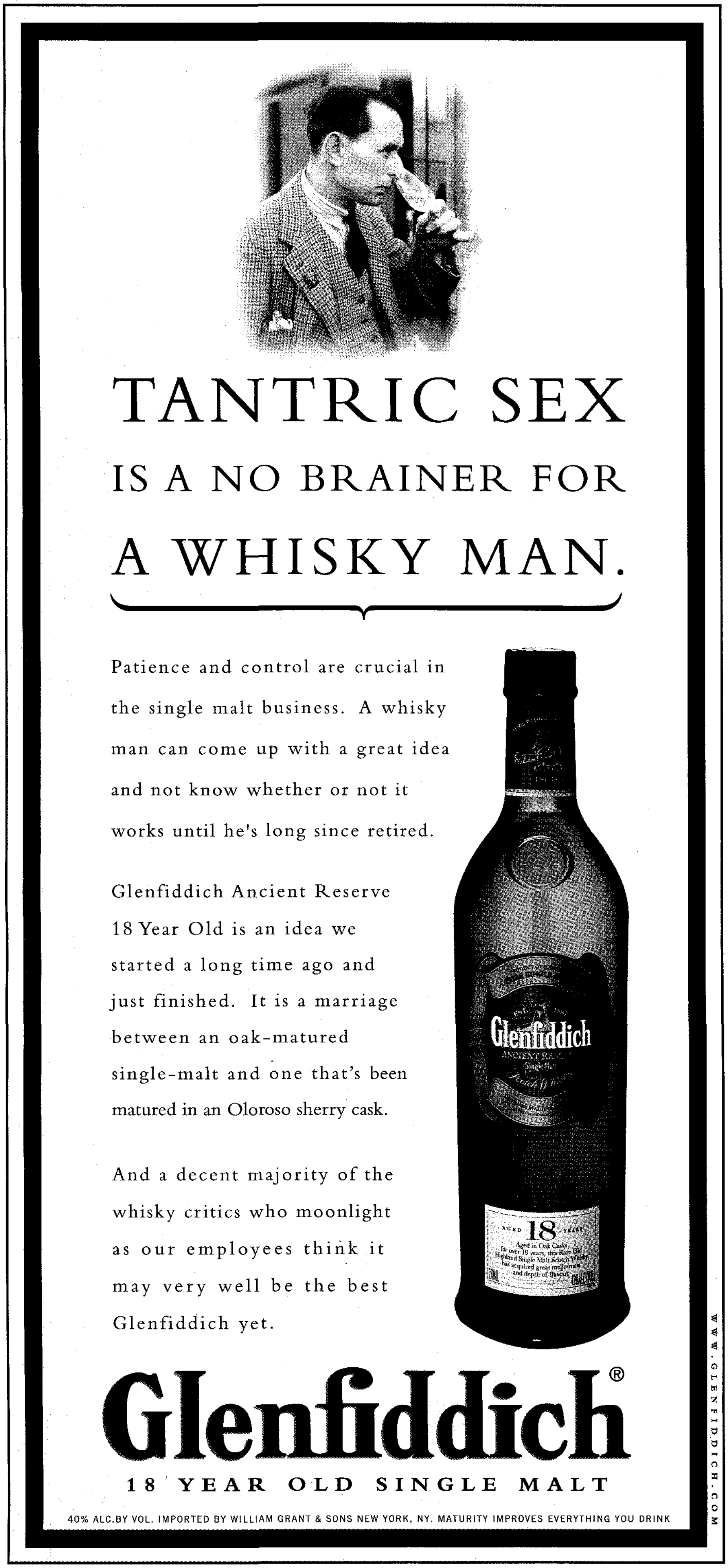
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BOOK CURRENTS

Wise Guys

THE caustic pundit H. L. Mencken was a brilliant wit, but when Richard Wright read two books by Mencken in 1927, at the age of nineteen, he was shocked by the force of the man's cynicism. He pictured Mencken, he later wrote, as "a raging demon, slashing with his pen . . . denouncing everything American. . . . He was using words as a weapon, using them as one would use a club." The scholar William Chaloupka tells this story in **Everybody Knows: Cynicism in America** (University of Minnesota), and he describes Mencken as one of the first sources of a national crisis in morale, which he feels is now pervasive. "It took a while for American cynicism to emerge, and starting points are always risky to identify," Chaloupka writes. "But this century has seen America turn cynical, sometimes distressingly so."

In his new book, **For Common Things: Irony, Trust, and Commitment in America Today** (Knopf), Jedediah Purdy, a twenty-four-year-old Harvard graduate, argues that American culture is awash in a corrosive sea of irony, which he defines as "a quiet refusal to believe in the depth of relationships, the sincerity of motivation, or the truth of speech. . . ." Many critics, and many of Purdy's contemporaries, have smirked at his well-meaning thesis, protesting that irony can be tremendously funny, but Purdy insists that irony has gone too far. He writes, "I cannot help believing that we need a way of thinking, and doing, that has in it more promise of goodness than the one we are now following."

Purdy's plea has been made by subtler American writers, from Joseph Heller in "Catch-22" to Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., whose nineteen-seventies chronicle of postmodern angst, **Breakfast of Champions**, has now made it to the movies and has been newly released by Delta paperbacks. "Nobody believes anymore in a new American paradise," Vonnegut writes in the preface. His antihero Kilgore Trout, who despairs of making a valid contribution to society, declares that he wants his epitaph to read, "SOMEBODY (Sometime to Sometime)—He Tried"—and the author even provides a winsomely mordant illustration of the tombstone.

NIGEL HOLMES

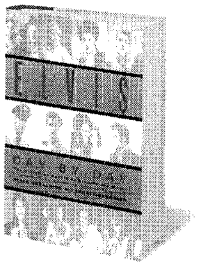
Books.

[AT BARNES & NOBLE]

Lyrical Lives

ELVIS DAY BY DAY

by Peter Guralnick & Ernst Jorgensen



Two of the world's foremost experts on Elvis Presley have produced a definitive, day-by-day look at the King. Granted exclusive access to thousands of photos and documents, the authors reveal previously unknown details of Elvis' public and private lives, including his family's struggle to make ends meet, his first job application and his father's postcards from prison.
(Ballantine Books)

Publisher's Price: $49.95 Discount **20%**

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ARETHA FROM THESE ROOTS

by Aretha Franklin & David Ritz

The Queen of Soul tells her story in an intimate and revealing biography. A gospel child prodigy and the daughter of a famous preacher, Aretha grew up amid a circle of family friends that included Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Art Tatum and Smokey Robinson. In a life marked by glorious triumphs and terrible sorrows, she has persevered with courage and character.
(Villard)

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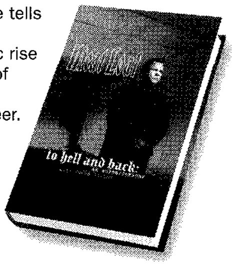
TO HELL AND BACK

by Meat Loaf with David Dalton



Meat Loaf has experienced the best and the worst life has to offer. Now, for the first time, he tells all. He recounts his youth with a violently abusive father, looks back on his meteoric rise to fame, details his descent into a world of hard drugs and nervous breakdowns, and reflects on the inspiring rebirth of his career.
(Regan)

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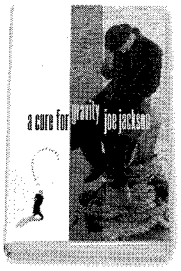
A CURE FOR GRAVITY

by Joe Jackson



The famously private Joe Jackson reveals the evolution of his life in music, from a culturally deprived childhood to the Royal Academy of Music to the spotlight of London's punk and new wave scene. Charming and candid, Jackson shares his thoughts on today's music, musicians, record companies, and critics.
(PublicAffairs)

Publisher's Price: $25.00 Discount **20%**

Our Price: $20.00

SPRINGSTEEN: POINT BLANK

by Christopher Sanford

The respected rock journalist and author of *Clapton: Edge of Darkness* and *Bowie: Loving the Alien* takes us from Springsteen's early years in New Jersey through the glory days of the seventies and eighties and into the present. Sanford interviewed virtually all the major figures in Springsteen's life, creating a compelling portrait of the man and a thoughtful analysis of his music.
(Da Capo Press)

Publisher's Price: $18.00 Discount **10%**

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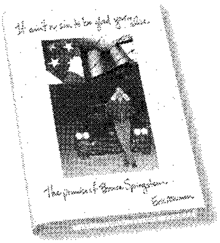
IT AIN'T NO SIN TO BE GLAD YOU'RE ALIVE

by Eric Alterman



Heralded as the savior of rock-n-roll in the late 1970s, Bruce Springsteen has maintained a uniquely powerful connection with his fans. Noted political journalist Eric Alterman examines the enduring impact of the Boss, a blue-collar worker from New Jersey who has become a cultural phenomenon, voicing the fears, dreams and desires of an entire generation.
(Little, Brown)

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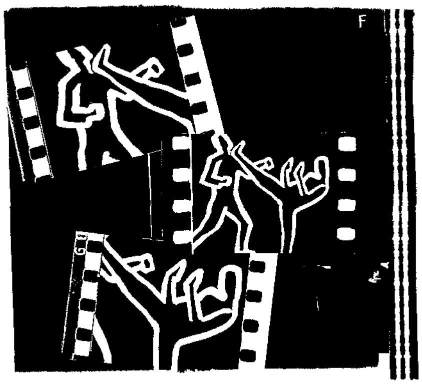


THE MOVIES

OPENING

Beefcake—Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening Oct. 13.

The Best Man—A romantic comedy about a group of college friends who gather for a wedding. With Taye Diggs, Nia Long, and Morris Chestnut; directed by Malcolm D. Lee. Opening Oct. 22.

Body Shots—Michael Cristofer's drama involves eight friends out for a night on the town in Los Angeles. With Sean Patrick Flanery, Jerry O'Connell, Amanda Peet, Tara Reid, Ron Livingston, Emily Procter, Brad Rowe, and Sybil Temchen. Opening Oct. 22.

The Boys—A dark drama about three brothers in Sydney, Australia. Directed by Rowan Woods. Opening Oct. 15. (Cinema Village.)

Bringing Out the Dead—Martin Scorsese's latest follows a New York City paramedic (Nicolas Cage) over a forty-eight-hour period. With Patricia Arquette, John Goodman, Ving Rhames, Tom Sizemore, and Marc Anthony. Opening Oct. 22.

The City—Writer-director David Ricker's feature tells the stories of four Latin-American immigrants living in New York City. In Spanish and English. Opening Oct. 22. (American Museum of the Moving Image and Quad Cinema.)

Crazy in Alabama—The story of a young boy (Lucas Black) and his aunt (Melanie Griffith) during the summer of 1965 in Alabama and Hollywood. Directed by Antonio Banderas. Opening Oct. 22.

Cremaster 2—The fourth installment in multimedia artist Matthew Barney's series of eccentric films. Opening Oct. 13. (Film Forum.)

Fever Pitch—David Evans directed the adaptation of Nick Hornby's autobiographical novel about a British schoolteacher (Colin Firth) and his obsession with soccer. Opening Oct. 15. (Village East Cinemas.)

Fight Club—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. Opening Oct. 15.

A Girl Called Rosemarie—Political blackmail and murder in nineteen-fifties Germany. With Nina Hoss, directed by Bernd Eichinger. In German. Opening Oct. 15. (Quad Cinema.)

Joe the King—A drama about a fourteen-year-old boy in upstate New York in the late seventies, written and directed by Frank Whaley. Opening Oct. 15.

Men Cry Bullets—A dark comedy, by writer-director Tamara Hernandez. Opening Oct. 22. (Angelika Film Center.)

Same Old Song—A musical, directed by Alain Resnais. In French. Opening Oct. 15. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

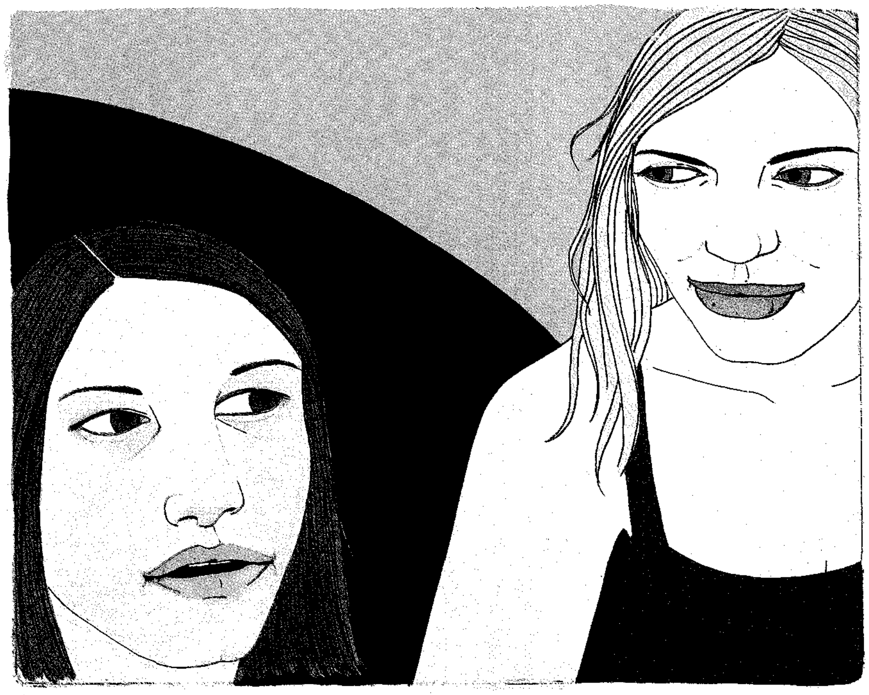
Show Me Love—A drama about growing up in a small town in Sweden. With Alexandra Dahlström and Rebecca Liljeberg, directed by Lukas Moodysson. In Swedish. Opening Oct. 15. (Quad Cinema.)

The Story of Us—A romantic comedy about married love. With Bruce Willis, Michelle Pfeiffer, Rita Wilson, Julie Hagerty, Paul Reiser, and Tim Matheson; directed by Rob Reiner. Opening Oct. 15.

The Straight Story—The story of Alvin Straight (Richard Farnsworth), who, in 1994, travelled two hundred and sixty miles from Iowa to Wisconsin on his John Deere tractor. With Sissy Spacek and Harry Dean Stanton. Directed by David Lynch. Opening Oct. 15.

That's the Way I Like It—Glen Goei's tale of the seventies disco scene in Singapore. Opening Oct. 15.

Three to Tango—A romantic comedy, with Matthew Perry, Neve Campbell, Dylan McDermott, and Oliver Platt; directed by Damon Santostefano. Opening Oct. 22.



Rebecca Liljeberg and Alexandra Dahlström in "Show Me Love."

LARA TOMLIN

FILM NOTES

(If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.)

American Beauty—This amazing and impassioned fantasia about American loneliness begins as satire and ends with a vision of the sublime. The defeated suburban patriarch Lester Burnham (Kevin Spacey), condemned by his withdrawn daughter (Thora Birch) and his hyperorganized wife (Annette Bening), drops out of his job and misbehaves badly. After Lester's marriage gets blown apart by squalls of comic contempt, the movie, which was written by Alan Ball and directed by the British theatre maestro Sam Mendes (it's his first film), opens up and takes in Lester's suburban territory—the dissatisfactions of the business-mad nineties, in which the gospel of selfishness leaves people clenched and isolated. The bitter satirical riffs slowly give way to a mystical appreciation of the vagrant beauty trapped beneath the surface of life.—*David Denby* (9/20/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Beekman, Kips Bay Theatres, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

Beefcake—This partially dramatized documentary illuminates the nineteen-fifties world of male-physique magazines, a charged combination of bodybuilding and homoeroticism. Director Thom Fitzgerald uses as his focal point the figure of Bob Mizer (Daniel MacIvor), a man in love with photography and with the well-built young men he recorded in classical poses. Mizer's dream of creating an agency to represent these aspiring models and actors began with a photo catalogue and soon evolved into the leading muscle magazine *Physique Pictorial* and a production company that put out thousands of beefcake movies. Plenty of that footage appears here, wittily blended with staged scenes from Mizer's self-made world. Completing the unusual format are interviews with some of its principal figures, from Jack LaLanne to Joe Dallesandro.—*Ken Marks* (Film Forum; starting Oct. 13.)

Black Cat, White Cat—Emir Kusturica's insistently sunny film about a small-time Serbian con man whose get-rich-quick schemes involve him with a coked-up, disco-dancing gangster and the aging local Mafia don. But this is a Rube Goldberg type of Gypsy Mafia, complete with train robberies (the entire train, not just the stuff in it), escapes from arranged marriages, and corpses kept in an attic under precariously balanced slabs of ice. The film's two and a quarter hours of unrelenting zaniness are more exhausting than uplifting. In Serbo-Croatian and Romany.—*K.M.* (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Boomerang! (1947)—Elia Kazan was still a fledgling movie director when he did this modest, cleanly made, rather simplistic crime picture. It's based on an episode in the career of Homer Cummings (who was Franklin Roosevelt's first Attorney General); as a state's attorney in Connecticut, Cummings became convinced that a man he was about to prosecute was innocent, and set about gathering evidence to clear him. The film was shot in Stamford (the actual events took place in Bridgeport). With Dana Andrews, Jane Wyatt, Lee J. Cobb, Ed Begley, and Karl Malden.—*Pauline Kael* (Miller Theatre; Oct. 24.)

Boys Don't Cry—Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Union Square.)

Dark Habits ("Entre Tinieblas"; 1983)—This amusingly erratic convent farce by the Spanish writer-director Pedro Almodóvar shows us his naughty-Catholic-schoolboy side. (Here, and in his later movies, he uses Catholic fetishism as camp.) Cristina S. Pascual plays Yolanda, a Madrid nightclub singer, who hides out from the police in a convent that specializes in the salvation of murderesses, prostitutes, and

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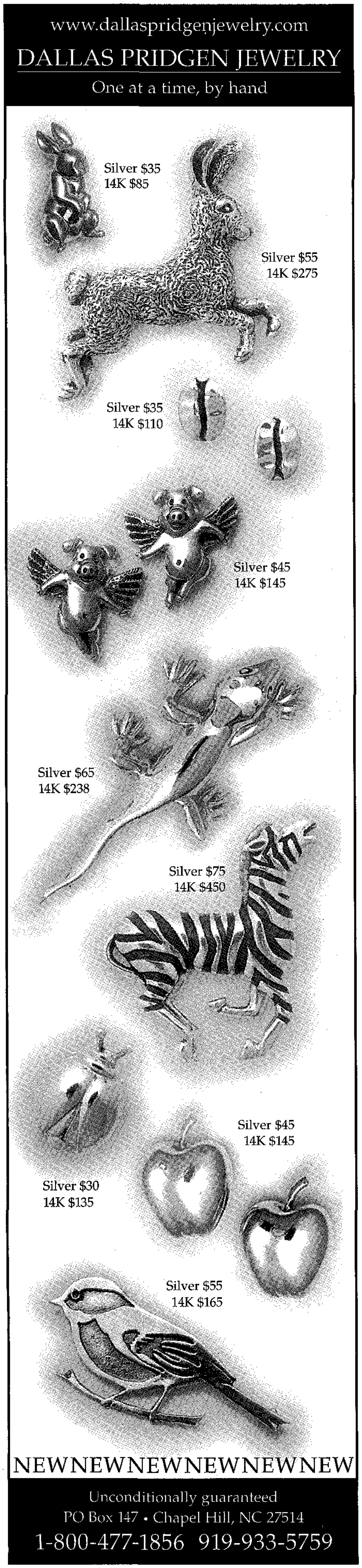
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junkies. The Mother Superior (Julieta Serrano) is so avid to recruit sinners that she'll shoot them up with heroin and supply anything else they want. (She's a junkie herself.) The jokes are sometimes labored; still, Almodóvar already had the disreputable sensuality that links him to early De Palma. In Spanish.—*P.K.* (American Museum of the Moving Image; Oct. 17.)

For Love of the Game—The Detroit Tigers pitcher Billy Chapel (Kevin Costner), a forty-year-old right-hander with a sore shoulder, works on a perfect game against the Yankees, and, as he pitches, innings of his relationship with a magazine writer and single mother (Kelly Preston) pass through his mind. Long-winded and redundant, but some of the baseball scenes are good. Directed by Sam Raimi.—*D.D.* (9/27/99) (Criterion Center, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 72nd Street East, and Waverly.)

Guinevere—Romantic and shrewdly realistic at the same time. A smart San Francisco girl, Harper (Sarah Polley), escapes an unhappy family of lawyers and a career at Harvard Law School and takes up instead with Connie (Stephen Rea), a bohemian Mission District photographer and con man who tells her that she's an artist. Rea doesn't mask Connie's decrepitude, but he colors it with a lilting voice and a sad-eyed charm, and the young Canadian actress Sarah Polley is a proud, delicate performer—a potential star. Written and directed with warmth and perception by Audrey Wells.—*D.D.* (9/27/99) (Angelika Film Center, Gotham Cinema, and Lincoln Square.)

Happy, Texas—Movies about convicts tend to sweat with desperation, but Mark Illsley's variation on the theme refuses to be shackled *to solemnity; it starts out in a mood of* high levity and goes on climbing. Steve Zahn and Jeremy Northam (now there's an odd couple for you) play a pair of hapless crooks who find themselves at liberty in the town of the title—a quietly run and easily pleased place where, thanks to a minor misunderstanding, everybody thinks that our heroes are gay beauty-pageant organizers and nobody seems to mind. The movie borrows some of that tolerance for itself, gazing indulgently on the God-fearing schoolteacher (Illeana Douglas) and the mournful sheriff (William H. Macy) as they yield to their respective desires. Illsley allows the plot to breathe while the characters play their comic solos, and they repay his trust; Zahn, especially, seems blissfully adrift in a world of his own stoned imaginings. With Ally Walker as a lovelorn bank manager called Joe—a typically confusing name for a movie where nobody plays it straight.—*Anthony Lane* (10/11/99) (Cinema I, Lincoln Square, and Union Square.)

The Limey—Steven Soderbergh has proved himself adept at treating American subjects with the careful, sidelong scrutiny of a European eye, and this picture sustains the trend. Terence Stamp plays Wilson, an alarmingly well-preserved British criminal who arrives in Los Angeles to investigate the fate of his late daughter. His inquiries, *which feel both bland and underhanded,* lead him to Terry Valentine (Peter Fonda), a record producer with a house in the hills and a millionaire's tan. The film is restless, given to sudden cuts and mysterious bursts of imagined violence, and yet not much happens: as expected, the hero takes his revenge, but the motives of his victims remain veiled, and even Wilson's own grief seems cheapened by his casual termination of other lives. The movie has both the shimmer and the vacancy of an exercise in style; most beguiling by far are the scenes from Wilson's past, which Soderbergh has actually lifted from "Poor Cow," Ken Loach's 1967 film that featured Terence Stamp. It's as if the actor has only ever existed inside the movies. With Barry Newman and Lesley Ann Warren.—*A.L.* (10/11/99) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

Mumford—The definition of "dud." The hero (Loren Dean) is a good listener—a young psychologist in a small American town who uses unorthodox methods and applies common-sense solutions to his patients' not very interesting problems. It turns out he has a secret, but its revelation has no dramatic effect whatsoever. The mood of this tepid comedy, which was written and directed by Lawrence Kasdan, is companionable but vaguely tedious—the movie resembles a droning radio show from about 1946. Kasdan solves his plot difficulties by pairing off the patients in unlikely combinations. With Martin Short, Hope Davis, Mary McDonnell, Jason Lee, and Pruitt Taylor Vince, all wasted.—*D.D.* (10/4/99) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema 3rd Avenue, East 86th Street Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, State, and Union Square.)

Mystery, Alaska—Director Jay Roach's follow-up to his latest "Austin Powers" installment begins with a fine, and promising, purity: a skater, alone in the Alaskan wilderness (it's actually Alberta, Canada), moves powerfully along a twisting frozen river. We track him from all angles: shot from high above, followed closer from behind, seen coming at the camera in slow motion. We get closeups of fancy footwork, hear the slash of metal on ice. It's a young man training to play in the Saturday game, which is the best thing that can happen to a hockey player in the tiny town of Mystery. The early scenes succeed as a tantalizing evocation of the love of sport for sport's sake. Russell Crowe is warm and impressive as the town sheriff and team captain, and Burt Reynolds, coiffed like a silver fox, is amusing as the town judge and team coach. Unfortunately, once the plot gets rolling—the New York Rangers are *coming to town for a game of pond hockey* against the locals—the feel-good sports-movie clichés start clicking into place, and by the end there's no mystery at all.—*K.M.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, East 86th Street Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Sutton, and Village East Cinemas.)

The Passion of Joan of Arc (1928)—One of the greatest of all movies. The director, Carl Dreyer, based the script on the trial records, and the testimony appears to be given for the first time. As the five gruelling cross-examinations follow each other, Dreyer turns the camera on the faces of Joan and the judges, and in giant closeups he interprets their emotions. In this enlargement Joan and her persecutors are shockingly fleshly—isolated with their sweat, warts, spittle, and tears, and (as no one used makeup) with startlingly individual contours, features, and skin. No other film has so subtly linked eroticism with religious persecution. Falconetti's Joan may be the finest performance ever recorded on film. The film is silent, but as you often see the (French) words forming on the actors' lips you may have the illusion that you've heard them.—*P.K.* (Film Forum; Oct. 15-17.)

Random Hearts—Harrison Ford, a gruff, miserable, and violent Washington, D.C., cop, has lost his wife in an airplane crash. Kristin Scott Thomas, a Republican congresswoman, elegant, articulate, and sophisticated, has lost her husband in the same crash. A little investigation on Ford's part yields the unpleasant discovery that the dead spouses were having an affair. Scott Thomas wants to let go; Ford wants to learn everything about the affair as a way of understanding his wife. The two survivors fight, and then make love, but the characters have been so thoroughly established as utterly unlike each other that their affair seems ridiculous. It's as if a bear had taken up with a swan: you want to look away. With Charles S. Dutton as Ford's partner. Directed with professional skill but too slow a tempo by Sydney Pollack, who appears in the movie as a cynical political advisor. Darryl Ponicsan adapted Warren Adler's novel, but

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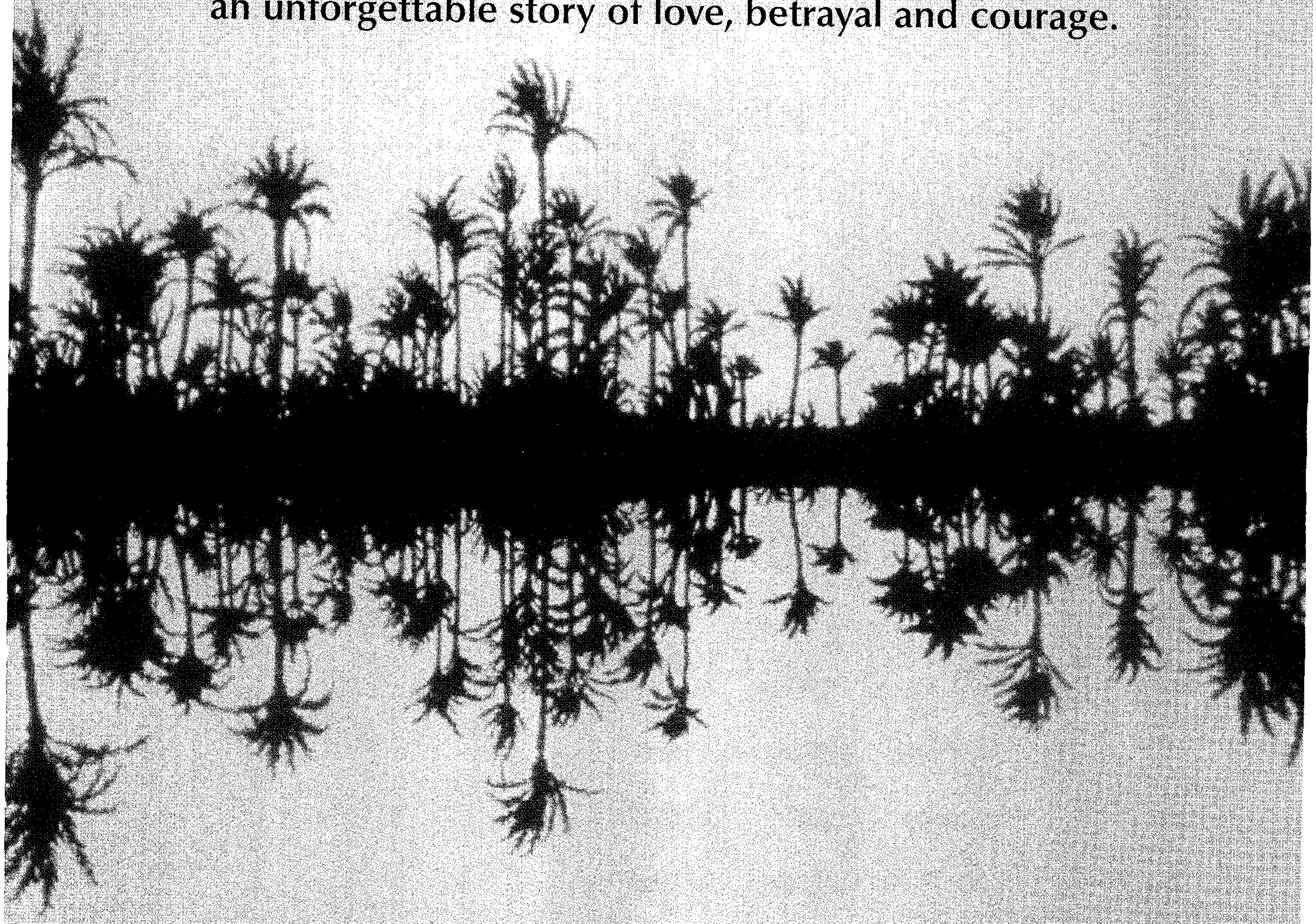

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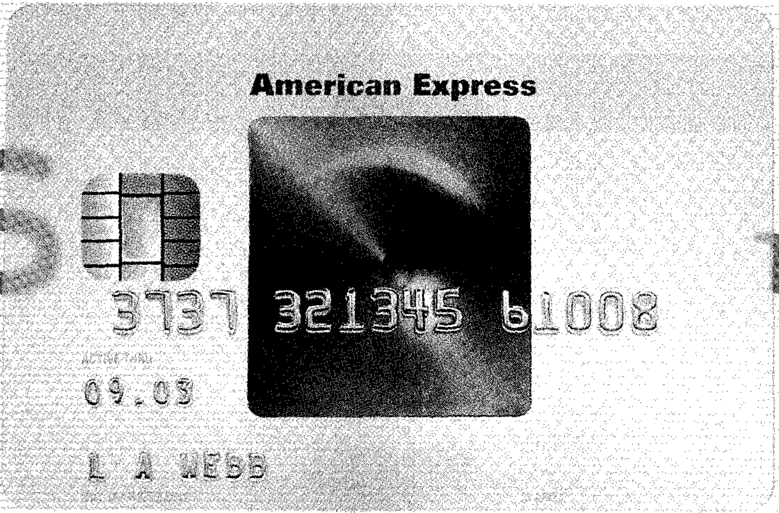
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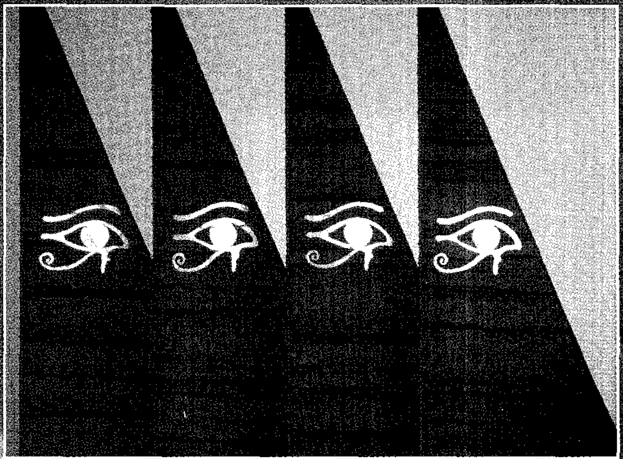
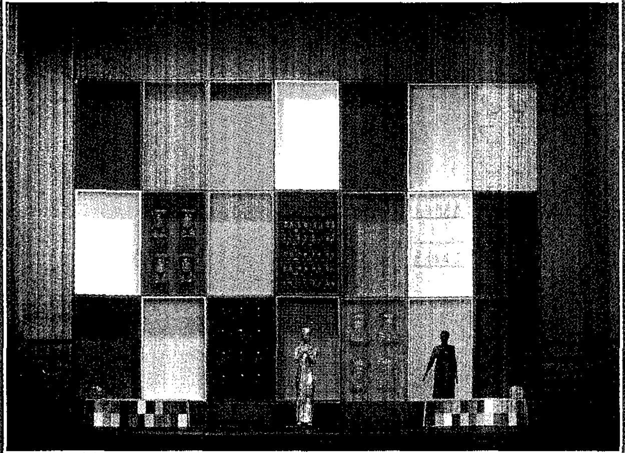


Act I, scene 1: The Slave Ships Return to Egypt



Act I, scene 5: Princess Amneris' Closet

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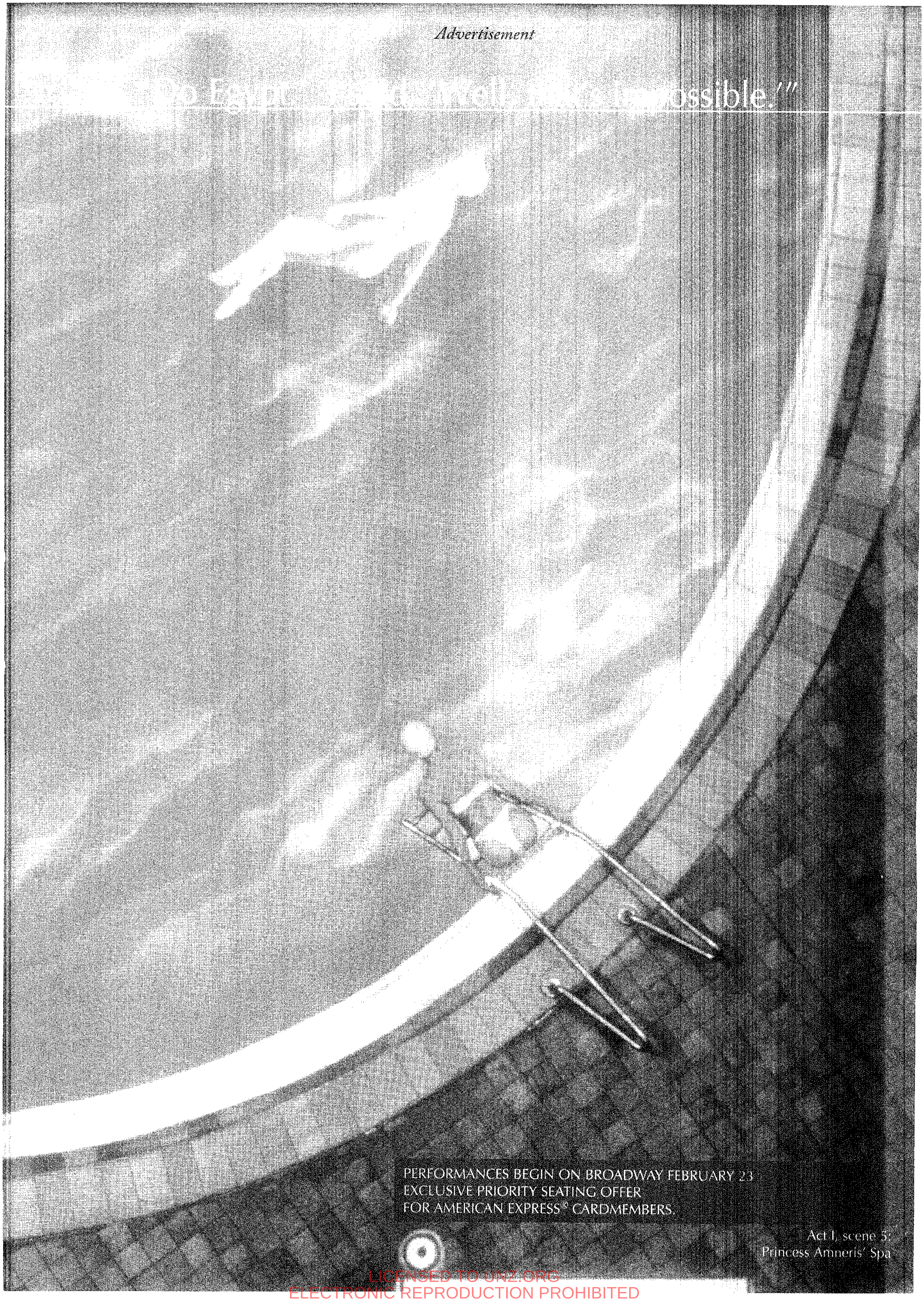

[illegible] Do Egypt[illegible] well [illegible] impossible!'"
Act I, scene 5:
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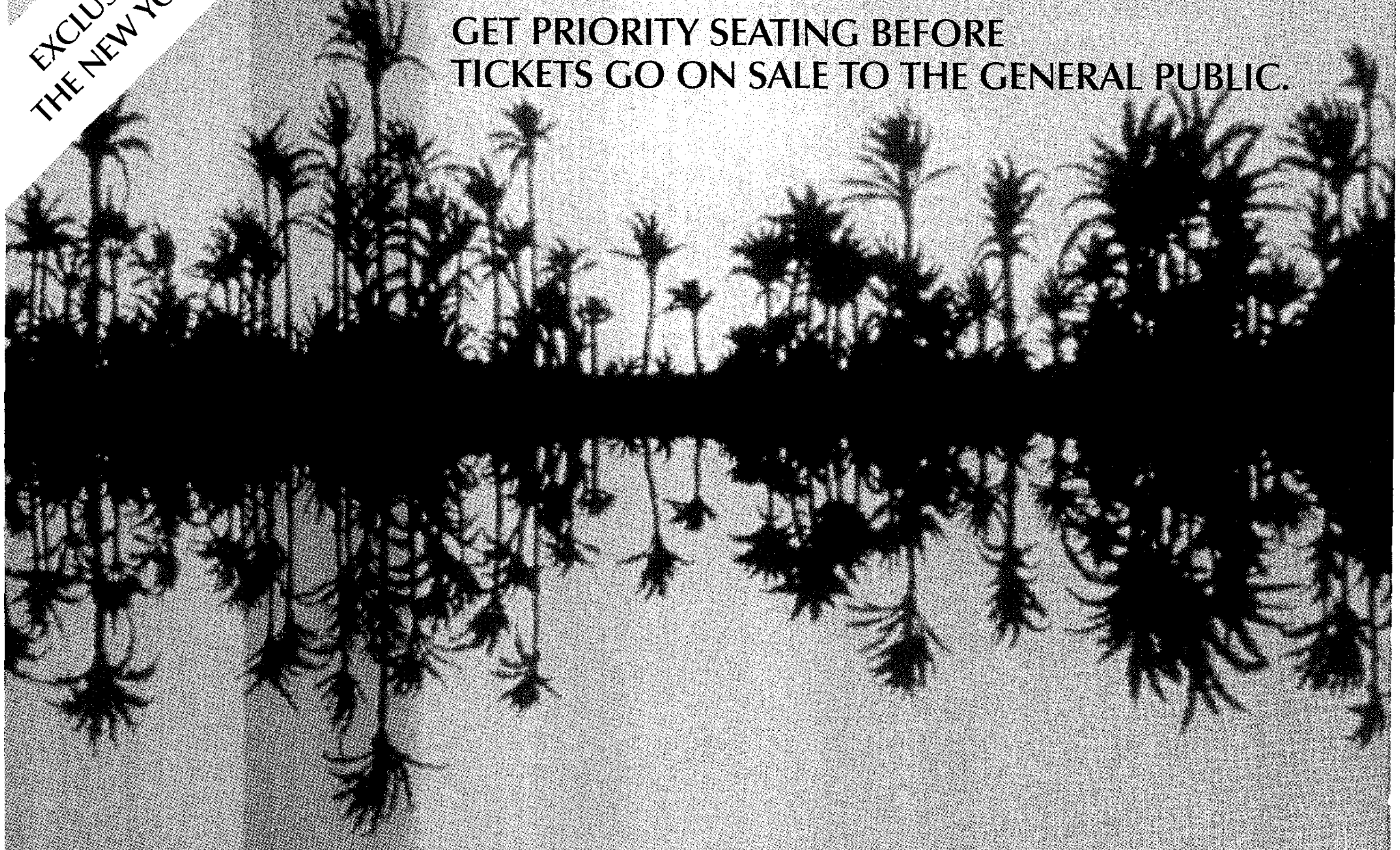

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the screenplay credit is given to Kurt Luedtke.—*D.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, State, Union Square, and Waverly.)

Romance—The great advantage of growing up French is that you can be absurd without ever knowing it. In Catherine Breillat's sexually explicit drama, Marie (Caroline Ducey), a dark teardrop of a girl who is spurned by her live-in boyfriend, drags herself without apparent pleasure through one sordid sex situation after another while intoning such thoughts to herself as "I like it to be anonymous. It's my purity—more metaphysical." Only in a French movie would a woman embrace sexual experimentation merely to attain an enormous *pensée*. Pornographic but unarousing, the movie feels like a third-rate Left Bank novel from fifty years ago. In French.—*D.D.* (9/27/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Eastside Playhouse, and Quad Cinema.)

Stir of Echoes—Kevin Bacon is Tom, a working-class Chicago guy who has never wanted to be famous, just not so ordinary. As it turns out, his son can communicate with the dead. Welcome to extra-ordinary, pal. Soon, Tom implausibly gains the sight his son possesses, and the ensuing ghost story and murder mystery unfold without much dread or suspense.—*K.M.* (Chelsea Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, State, and Union Square.)

Sugar Town—An L.A. satire that's not nearly mean enough for its own good. Allison Anders and Kurt Voss, who co-wrote and co-directed, introduce us to a group of friends and acquaintances on the fringes of the movie and music businesses. Everybody's dissatisfied. The rock guys, who were big in the eighties, are having trouble getting arrested. The actress (Rosanna Arquette), a former horror-film ingénue, balks at having to play her age. It's pretty familiar material by now (Robert Altman's nailed this milieu at least twice), and it's not helped by the marshmallowy consistency of nearly every scene.—*K.M.* (First & 62nd Cinemas and Union Square.)

Three Kings—Or, "Four Men in a Humvee." At its best, David O. Russell's murderously unstable movie about the end of the Gulf War offers wild, bitter farce and fitful insights into the oddity of the conflict. At its worst, it's an irresponsible, infuriating mess. Are we supposed to get excited when American soldiers charge into a bunker in search of the gold that Saddam's troops looted from Kuwait? Russell can't stop himself from celebrating American know-how and prowess even as he's mocking the soldiers as amoral thieves. Then he changes direction again and turns them into noble fellows who empathize with the anti-Saddam irregulars left inside Iraq at the end of the war. The movie's style ranges from extravagant experimentation (at moments of conflict, Russell whips the camera around like a bola) to cruddy action theatrics. With George Clooney, Mark Wahlberg, Ice Cube, and Spike Jonze.—*D.D.* (10/4/99) (Chelsea West, Criterion Center, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, New York Twin, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

True Heart Susie (1919)—A lovely, simple pastoral romance—one of the most charming of all D. W. Griffith films. Close to perfection, on a small scale. Lillian Gish is Susie, Robert Harron is William, and Clarine Seymour is Bettina, William's pleasure-loving bride, who sneaks out to a party and can't get back into her house. Scott Fitzgerald must have seen the film before he wrote "Babylon Revisited." Silent.—*P.K.* (Museum of Modern Art; Oct. 14 and Oct. 16.)

West Beirut—The best début movies have a quality all their own—a kind of breathless, jolting ebullience, suggesting that young filmmakers would burst if they didn't get to tell their stories. The Lebanese director Ziad Doueiri is one such enthusiast; his movie has its rough patches and, toward the end, its slightly damp longueurs, but it nails a time and a place so firmly that, when it ends, you feel bereft. Based largely on Doueiri's own teen-age years, it stars his brother Rami as Tarek, a Beirut schoolboy with a sly smile. Tarek lives with his parents, Hala (Carmen Lebbos) and Riad (Joseph Bou Nassar), in the Muslim area of East Beirut; the tale begins in April, 1975, when sectarian rivalries split the city in two. Suddenly, Tarek and his friend Omar (Mohamad Chamas) are unable to attend school in the Eastern sector; the simple act of getting film developed involves a mortal risk. There are extraordinary scenes here, as moments of light comedy flip casually into the treacherous, and vice versa; if you want solid political history, the film is no more than an infuriating sketch, but as an exercise in the unpredictable it shows both nerve and charm. In Arabic.—*A.L.* (9/6/99) (BAM Rose Cinemas and Village East Cinemas.)

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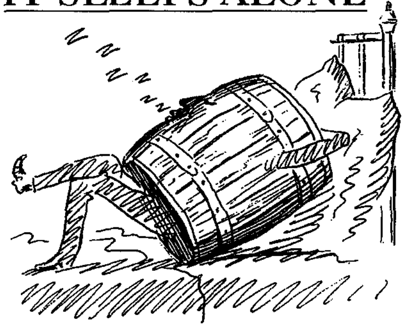

A FRUGAL AND ANONYMOUS SCOT, LONG YEARS AGO, observed that the oaken casks which had been used for bringing sherry, port, or madeira into the country, might be employed thereafter to *mature malt whisky*.

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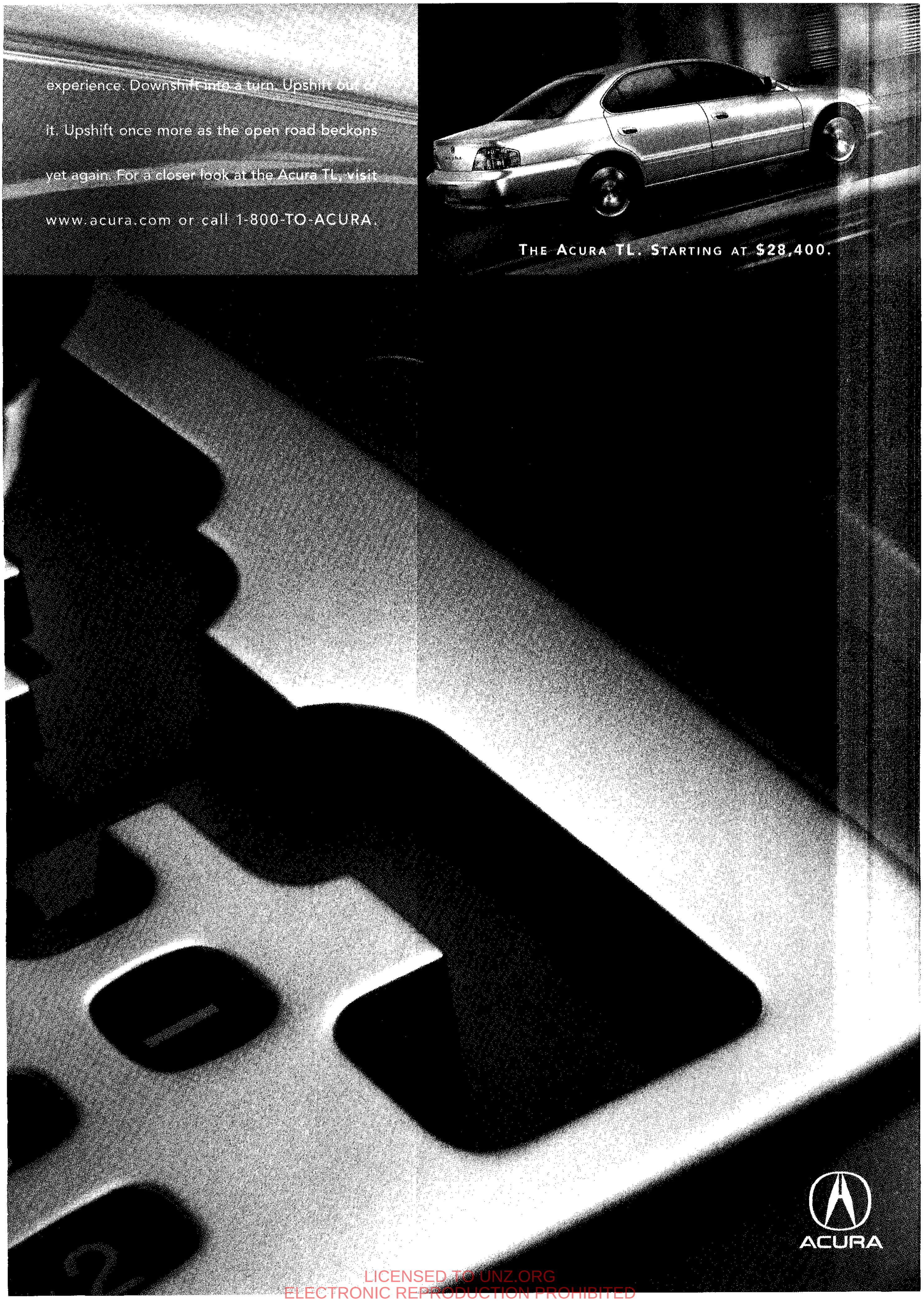

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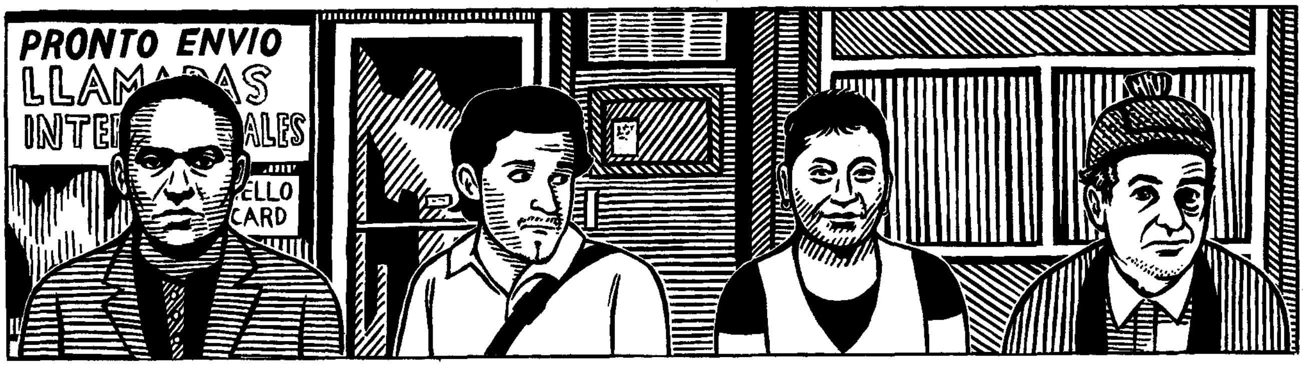
lage. . . . **BLUE STREAK:** Criterion Center, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **BUENA VISTA SOCIAL CLUB:** Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **THE DINNER GAME:** Paris. . . . **DOUBLE JEOPARDY:** Astor Plaza, Coronet Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Olympia, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **DRIVE ME CRAZY:** Chelsea Cinemas, Criterion Center, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, 62nd & Broadway, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **EARTH:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema. . . . **L'ENNUI:** Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **EYES WIDE SHUT** (7/26/99): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **FIVE WIVES, THREE SECRETARIES AND ME:** Quad Cinema. . . . **LA GRANDE ILLUSION** (1937): Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **THE GRANDFATHER:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **ILLUMINATA:** Union Square. . . . **JAKOB THE LIAR:** Chelsea Cinemas, East 85th Street Cinema, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Union Square, and Ziegfeld. . . . **JULIEN DONKEY-BOY:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **LOVE REINVENTED:** Quad Cinema. . . . **LUCIE AUBRAC:** Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **MICKEY BLUE EYES:** 64th and 2nd. . . . **THE MINUS MAN:** Angelika Film Center. . . . **THE MUSE** (9/13/99): 59th Street East Cinema and The Screening Room. . . . **NEW ROSE HOTEL:** Cinema Village. . . . **OUTSIDE PROVIDENCE:** Sutton and Village East Cinemas. . . . **PLUNKETT & MACLEANE:** Angelika Film Center, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Kips Bay Theatre. . . . **RUN LOLA RUN:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **THE SIXTH SENSE** (8/23-30/99): Cinema II, Criterion Center, East 86th Street Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, and Village East Cinemas. . . . **THE SOURCE:** Cinema Village. . . . **SPLENDOR:** The Screening Room. . . . **STAR WARS: EPISODE I—THE PHANTOM MENACE** (5/24/99): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **STIGMATA:** Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, State, Union Square, and Waverly. . . . **STOP MAKING SENSE** (1984): Cinema Village. . . . **SUPERSTAR:** First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theare, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, State, and Village Theatre VII. . . . **THE 13TH WARRIOR:** Union Square. . . . **THE THOMAS CROWN AFFAIR** (8/9/99) Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **TRICK:** Chelsea Cinemas. . . . **WHITEBOYS:** Union Square.



Opening Oct. 22, David Riker's "The City."

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—A program of films by or about Carl Theodor Dreyer. Oct. 13: "Carl Theodor Dreyer: My Métier" (1996, Torben Skjodt Jensen) and "The Parson's Widow" (1920; silent). . . . Oct. 14-15: "Vampyr" (1932; in German). . . . Oct. 15-17: "The Passion of Joan of Arc" (†). . . . Oct. 16-17: "Ordet" (1955; in Danish). . . . Oct. 18: "Day of Wrath" (1943; in Danish). . . . Oct. 19: "Gertrud" (1964; in Danish). . . . ¶ From Oct. 20: "North by Northwest" (1959, Alfred Hitchcock).

Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—The first in a seventeen-month-long series of films from the museum's collection, this program consists of silent films, 1893-1928. Oct. 14 at 2:30: "Blood and Sand" (1922, Fred Niblo). . . . Oct. 14 at 6 and Oct. 16 at 2: "True Heart Susie" (†). . . . Oct. 15 at 2:30 and Oct. 17 at 5: "The Seventh Day" (1922, Henry King). . . . Oct. 15 at 6 and Oct. 18 at 2: "Homunculus, Chapter 4: The Revenge of Homunculus" (1916, Otto Rippert; German intertitles). . . . Oct. 15 at 8 and Oct. 17 at 2: "Grandma's Boy" (1922, Fred Newmeyer). . . . Oct. 16 at 2, Oct. 22 at 7:30, and Oct. 24 at 5: Two programs of short films made by the Edison Company. . . . Oct. 16 at 5: "The Taking of Luke McVane" (1915, William S. Hart) and "Wild Bill Hickok" (1923, Clifford S. Smith). . . . Oct. 16-17 at 5, Oct. 22 at 6, and Oct. 23 at 2: Two programs of short films D. W. Griffith made at the Biograph Studio. . . . Oct. 17 and Oct. 24 at 2 and Oct. 23 at 5: Two programs of short films made at the Vitagraph Company. . . . Oct. 18 at 6 and Oct. 19 at 2: "A Fool There Was" (1915, Frank Powell). . . . Oct. 19 at 6 and Oct. 21 at 2: "Mistress Nell" (1915, James Kirkwood). . . . Oct. 21 at 6: "Hell's Hinges" (1916, Hart and Charles Swickard). . . . Oct. 22 at 2:30 and Oct. 25 at 6: "When the Clouds Roll By" (1919, Victor Fleming). . . . Oct. 22 at 6 and Oct. 23 at 2: "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" (1920, Robert Wiene). . . . Oct. 22 at 8 and Oct. 24 at 2: "The Clodhopper" (1917, Victor Schertzinger). . . . Oct. 23 at 5 and Oct. 26 at 2: A program of Harold Lloyd short films. . . . Oct. 24 at 5 and Oct. 25 at 2:30: "Flirting with Fate" (1916, W. Christy Cabanne). . . . Oct. 26 at 6: "The Poor Little Rich Girl" (1917, Maurice Tourneur). . . . ¶ Oct. 14 at 3 and Oct. 15 at 6:30: "The Trip to Bountiful" (1953, Vincent J. Donehue), a television program, with Lillian Gish.

Walter Reade Theatre, Lincoln Center (875-5600)—Oct. 13-27: A program of films by Taiwanese director Hou Hsiao-hsien; in Tainwanese, Cantonese, Mandarin, and/or Japanese, with English subtitles. . . . ¶ Oct. 14 at 7:30: "Down by Law" (1986, Jim Jarmusch). . . . ¶ Oct. 16-17 at 2: "It Came from Outer Space" (1953, Jack Arnold). . . . ¶ Oct. 21 at 6:30: "Shadow Boxers" (1999, Katya Bankowsky). . . . ¶ Oct. 23-24 at 2: "Revenge of the Creature" (1955, Arnold).

BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—Oct. 13: "M" (1931, Fritz Lang; in German). . . . Oct. 14: "Contempt" (1963, Jean-Luc Godard; in French). . . . Oct. 15: "Private Lives" (1931, Sidney Franklin). . . . Oct. 16: "Blithe Spirit" (1945, David Lean). . . . Oct. 17: "Design for Living" (1933, Ernst Lubitsch). . . . Oct. 18: "Ladies of Leisure" (1930, Frank Capra). . . . Oct. 19: "First Name: Carmen" (1983, Godard; in French). . . . Oct. 20-21: "My Dinner with André" (1982, Louis Malle). . . . Oct. 22-24: A program of new films from Europe. . . . Oct. 25: "The Miracle Woman" (1931, Capra). . . . Oct. 26: "Nosferatu, the Vampyre" (1979, Werner Herzog; in German).

American Museum of the Moving Image, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—A program of films directed by Pedro Almodóvar; in Spanish, with English subtitles. Oct. 16 at 2: "Matador" (1985). . . . Oct. 16 at 4:30: "The Flower of My Secret" (1996). . . . Oct. 17 at 2: "Dark Habits" (†). . . . Oct. 17 at 4:30: "Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!" (1989). . . . ¶ Oct. 23 at 1 and 4 and Oct. 24 at 1:30 and 4:30: Four different programs of films by Don McKellar.

A Different Light Bookstore, 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—A Sunday-night series of free films (and popcorn). On Oct. 17 at 7, the feature will be "Daughters of Darkness" (1971, Harry Kumel); on Oct. 24 at 7: "The Hunger" (1983, Tony Scott).

Museum of Television and Radio, 25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—A program of television shows featuring Noël Coward works. Through Oct. 14: "Ford Star Jubilee: This Happy Breed" (1956), with Coward. . . . Oct. 15-21: A program of short appearances and interviews given by Coward. (Tuesdays through Sundays at 2:30.). . . ¶ Through Oct. 17: Parts V and VI of Dennis Potter's "Pennies from Heaven" (1978), with Bob Hoskins. . . . Oct. 19-24: Parts I and II of "Pennies from Heaven." . . . From Oct. 26: Parts III and IV of "Pennies from Heaven." (Tuesdays through Sundays at 1:30.)

Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—Oct. 19 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "Between Heaven and Earth" (1992, Marion Hänsel; in French). . . . Oct. 26 at 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, and 9: "The Other Shore" (1997, Dominique Cabrera; in French).

Anthology Film Archives, 32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—Oct. 14 at 6:30: "Nothing but a Man" (1965, Michael Roemer and Robert Young). . . . Oct. 15 and Oct. 21 at 7 and Oct. 24 at 9: "Closely Watched Trains" (1966, Jiří Menzel; in Czech). . . . Oct. 15 at 9 and Oct. 16 at 7: "Capricious Summer" (1967, Menzel; in Czech). . . . Oct. 16-17 at 4: "Italianamerican" (1974), "It's Not Just You, Murray!" (1964), and "American Boy" (1978), all directed by Martin Scorsese. . . . Oct. 16 at 9 and Oct. 17 at 7: "Larks on a String" (1969, Menzel; in Czech). . . . Oct. 16 at 9:30: "Man with a Movie Camera" (1929, Dziga Vertov; silent). . . . Oct. 17 at 9 and Oct. 20 at 7: "Cutting It Short" (1980, Menzel; in Czech). . . . Oct. 20 at 9 and Oct. 22 at 7: "Festival of the Snowdrops" (1983, Menzel; in Czech). . . . Oct. 22 at 9 and Oct. 23 at 7: "My Sweet Little Village" (1985, Menzel; in Czech).

Miller Theatre, Broadway at 116th St. (854-7799)—A series of films directed by Elia Kazan. Oct. 18 at 6: "Pinky" (1949). . . . Oct. 18 at 8:30: "Wild River" (1960). . . . Oct. 24 at 6: "Boomerang!" (†). . . . Oct. 24 at 8:30: "A Streetcar Named Desire" (1951).

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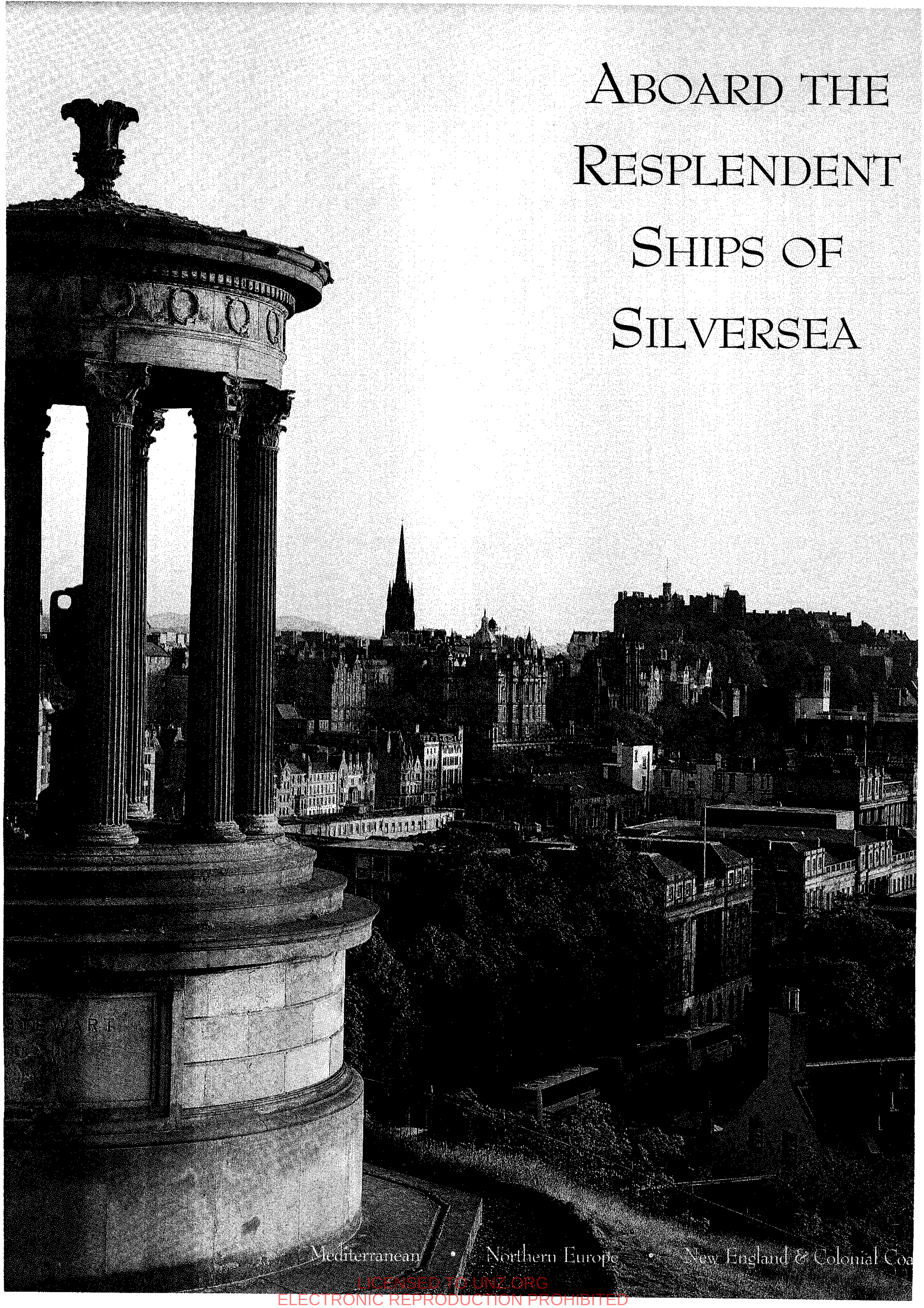
AND DISCOVER THE INTOXICATING MAGIC
OF THE MOST LONGED FOR DESTINATIONS...



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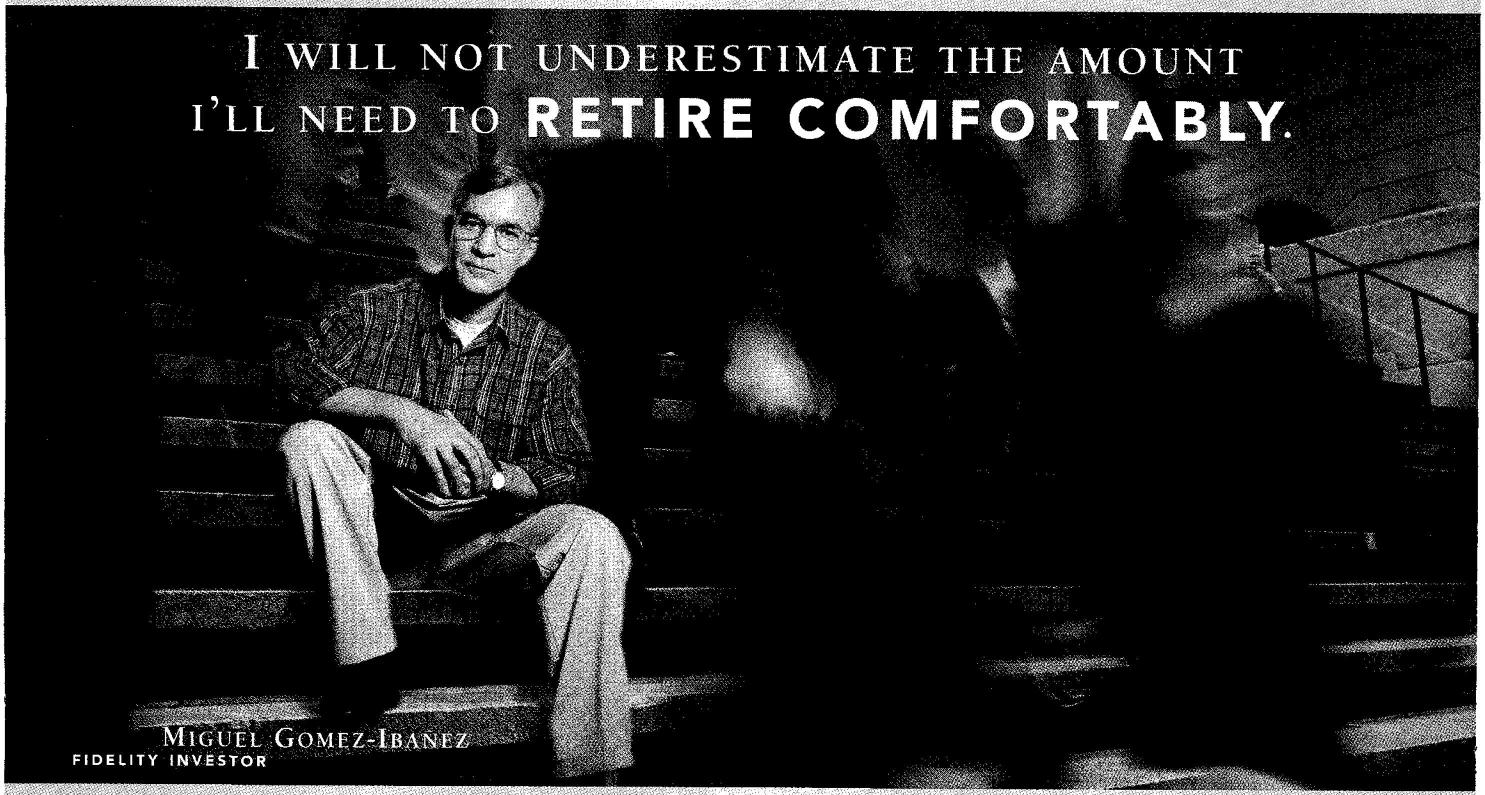

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

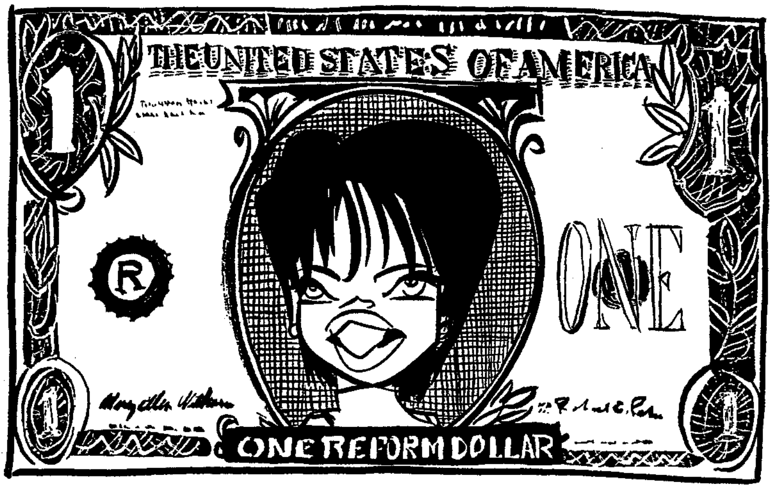
COMMENT

Take the money and run.

The news, last week, that Oprah Winfrey's name had been added to the list of those being mentioned as possible Presidential nominees of the Reform Party came as no real surprise. The only mystery was what took the mentioners so long to get around to her. She is, first of all, famous—uninominally famous, like Picasso, Fidel, and Garbo. She is rich—the three-hundred-and-forty-eighth-richest person in the country, according to the Forbes 400 list, which pegs her net worth at nearly three-quarters of a billion dollars. Her pile of cash may not be as high as Ross Perot's ($3.8 billion), but it's high enough to make her one of the three or four wealthiest self-made women in the country, and the wealthiest entertainer, bar none. Like one out of three recent Presidents, she is an actor and television host by trade. She is smart. (That's why she's so rich.) She is likable. She promotes book-reading. She has never made a fool of herself.

Oprah, then, would be a hell of a candidate. But where, some may ask, does she stand on the issues? Who knows? Who cares? We are talking, after all, about a party whose potential candidates include, reading from left to right, a sixties-style McGovernite liberal with social-democratic leanings (Warren Beatty, actor-director and family man), an abortion-rights monomaniac (Cybill Shepherd, actor), a renegade moderate-to-liberal Republican (Lowell Weicker, former Connecticut senator and governor), a freethinking secularist libertarian populist fiscally conservative goo-goo (Jesse Ventura, rassler and governor of Minnesota), an anti-tax solipsist (Donald Trump, urban landlord), a budget-cutting technocratic conspiracy theorist (Mr. Perot, data-processing government contractor), and a Nixonite-Reaganite protectionist isolationist America-first anti-abortion movement conservative with Falangist tendencies (Pat Buchanan, broadcaster and ex-speechwriter). The Reform Party, it would appear, does not insist on doctrinal (or occupational) purity.

Historically, American third parties have been based on one of four things: ideology, as in the old Socialist Party and the current Libertarian Party; class grievance, as in the Populists of the eighteen-nineties; a single overriding issue, as in the Anti-Masonic Party of the eighteen-thirties, the Free Soilers of the eighteen-fifties, and today's Greens; or a major-party schism reflecting some mixture, in varying proportions, of policy disgruntlement and thwarted personal ambition, as in the candidacies of Theodore Roosevelt in 1912, Robert M. LaFollette in 1924, Henry Wallace in 1948, George Wallace in 1968, and John B. Anderson in 1980.


THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
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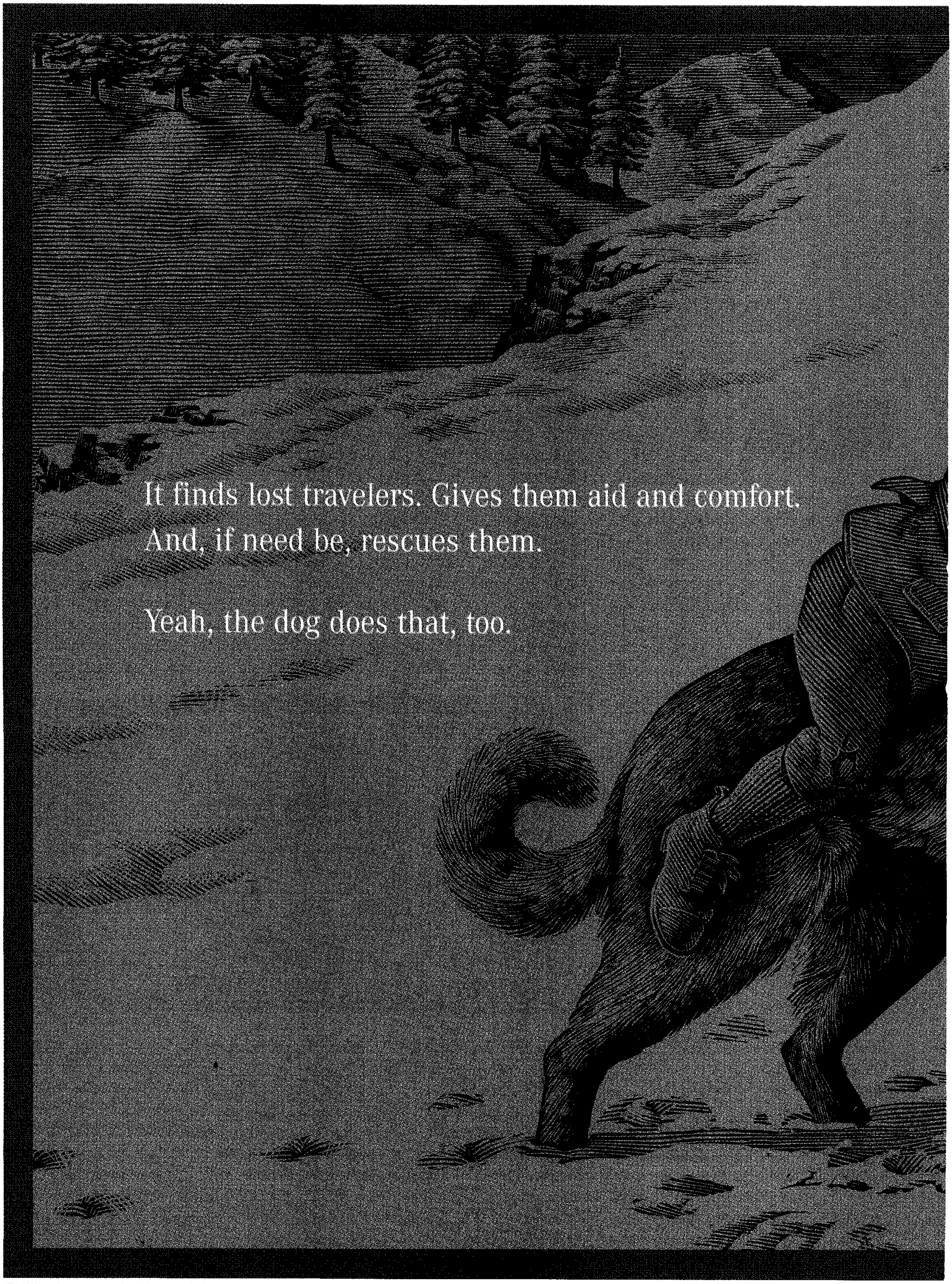
ONE
ONE REFORM DOLLAR

The Reform Party fits none of these patterns. It is something new: a third party whose raison d'être is money. Money—Mr. Perot's money—called the Reform Party into being in the first place. And money—Uncle Sam's money, in the form of a $12.6 million block grant to the eventual nominee, reflecting the Party's performance in 1996—explains its continued existence.

The Reform Party is one of the more grotesque, if less harmful, artifacts of America's lopsided system of campaign financing, which, in turn, is a product of America's curious system of making laws. In the mid-seventies, in the wake of Watergate, the House and the Senate, with the grudging acquiescence of President Ford, bargained and blundered their way into enacting some reforms. Then the Supreme Court, exercising what amounted to a line-item veto, snipped off the bits it didn't like. The resulting regime of campaign finance is—as might be expected, given the way it was designed—an incoherent, unbelievably complicated mess that subjects our politics to all sorts of unwholesome distortions. In 1976, in Buckley v. Valeo, the Court decreed that it was O.K. for Congress to have capped individual

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL



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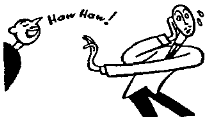
campaign contributions at a thousand dollars, but not when the contributor happens to be the candidate. Thanks to that decision, rich candidates can spend as much of their own money as they like on their own campaigns. Of course, poor candidates can do the same thing: they, too, can spend as much of their own money as they like. The Court's justice is majestic in its evenhandedness.

That $12.6-million Reform Party windfall may not be much compared with the three billion dollars that candidates for federal office are expected to spend during the 2000 election cycle, but it's enough to guarantee plenty of mischief. A nice irony: to the very limited extent that the Reform Party is an expression of political sentiment, the sentiment it expresses (or, if you prefer, exploits) is disgust with a political system whose workings are obscure, whose mechanisms are subject to manipulation by unaccountable forces, and whose outcomes, seemingly, are more and more distantly related to any semblance of purposeful democratic choice. Nevertheless, the Reform Party, willy-nilly, is well on its way to becoming one more comfortably established part of the problem to which it once feebly claimed to be the solution. Unanticipated consequences: today on "Oprah."

—HENDRIK HERTZBERG

RITUAL HUMILIATION DEPT.

How the Friars Club turned its annual roast into a PG occasion.

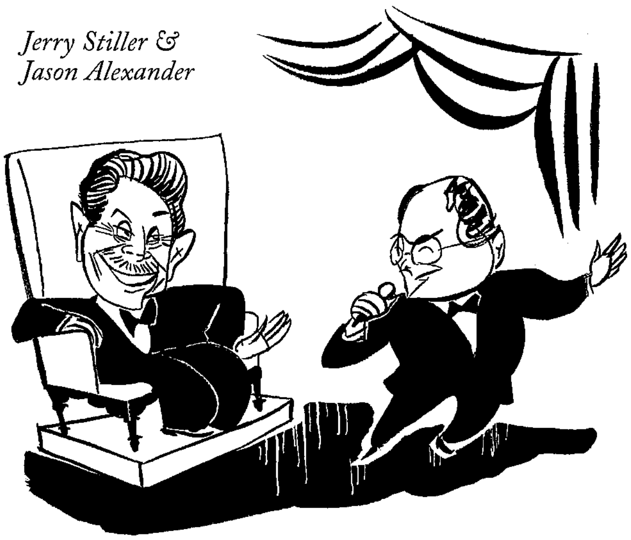


WHEN the New York Friars Club, the ninety-five-year-old stronghold for show-biz folks, began planning its annual roast, which took place on October 1st at the New York Hilton, the organizers asked Friar Jeffrey Ross, a thirty-three-year-old standup comic, to help out. This year's honoree was to be the actor Jerry Stiller, and the roastmaster the actor Jason Alexander. Ross, a friendly man with bulging, clownlike cheeks, is the Friar responsible for recruiting dozens of other young comics, such as Janeane Garofalo and Drew Carey, into the Friars. He immediately started making up jokes to offer to the roasters, and he sought out veteran roasters for suggestions.

Shortly before the roast, when the comedian Buddy Hackett was in town, Ross met him at the Friars Club for lunch. Hackett, wearing a bright-red blazer and tan slacks, was in a good mood. His new television show, "Action," had just been picked up for thirteen weeks.

"I call it a dramedy," the senior comic proclaimed, in the familiar, heavily enunciated Buddy Hackett syllables. "I'm da uncle-chauffeur-driver-bodyguard of da film producer, played by Jay Mohr. To make my character, I gotta be honest, true to myself. It all comes from in *me*. Dat's da key. Don't let anybody stop you, in whatever you're gonna do in comedy or in roasting, from making it out of your own self."

"Buddy is very serious about the art of standup," Ross said solemnly.



Jerry Stiller & Jason Alexander

"Yeah, it's our creative art," Hackett said. "A real art."

He went on: "F'rinstance, in 1945, when I started, as Butch Hacker, at the Pink Elephant in Coney Island for ten dollars a night, I would talk about my mother. I'd say, 'My mother caught me in bed with a girl, and she said, "Soon you'll be smoking." ' "

Jeffrey Ross said, "In my act last night, I said, 'The first time my girl saw me naked, she said, "Is everything a joke with you?" ' It killed."

"Be unafraid and make it honest, from inside yourself," Buddy Hackett said. "It's our art."

Ross said, "At the L.A. Friars Club the other day, Milton Berle told me about the old roasts. He was the roastmaster when the Friars roasted Lucille Ball in 1961, twenty-six years before they even allowed women to join. Uncle Miltie came out and said, 'Because we are honoring a lady, tonight you will not hear any dirty words, no four-letter words, but it is still quite an honor to be asked to serve as roastmaster for the great comedian and actress Lucille Testicle.' When Uncle Miltie was a roastmaster, he told me, he would try to say 'cunt' in the first three minutes. That way, he knew the gates were open and tradition would be upheld."

"Yeah," Buddy Hackett said. "But the roast ended many years ago. The day the critics from *Variety* were invited to see the roast, it killed it. What we were doing in those days, we were doing for ourselves. It was private. It was so private they made the waiters leave the room. It was only for us alone. Now it's FUBAR—Fucked Up Beyond All Recognition."

"Well, it'll be edited for television, two and a half hours into one," Ross said. "For Comedy Central."

"Yeah, all two million outsiders," Hackett said.

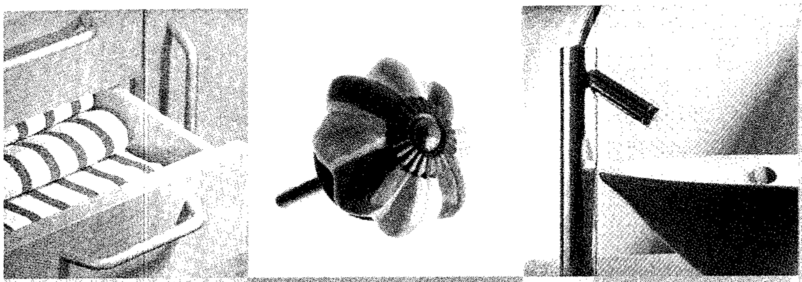
A couple of days before the roast, a sad-looking Jerry Stiller—on a two-week hiatus from working in L.A. on the sitcom "King of Queens"—and his playwright wife and longtime acting partner, Anne Meara, met Jeffrey Ross for lunch on the Upper West Side. (The Stillers' children, Ben, an actor-director-writer, and Amy, a comedian, were both due to turn up on R Day.) Meara is not a Friar.

"They're a bunch of pottymouths getting together," Meara said. "Every other word is 'fuck' or 'cock.' "

"It's not my style," Stiller said, worried. "I have trouble with those words. In a restaurant I always order *chest* of chicken."

Jeffrey Ross looked stricken. "It's the World Series of comedy," he said. "It will be fun."

"Yeah. Let's cling to that," Meara



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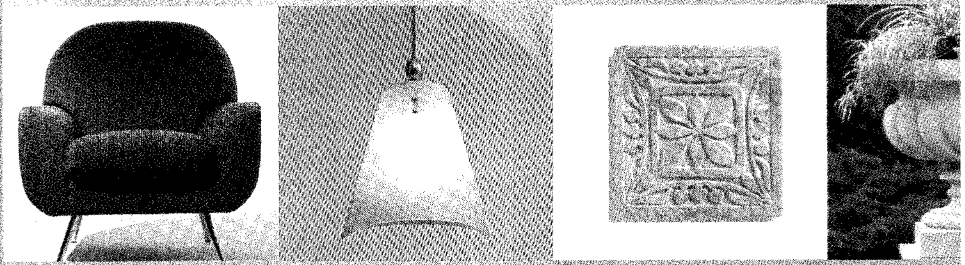

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said. "Jerry's up all night worrying about something to say."

"Now I know why Jacob sacrificed Isaac," Stiller said.

Jeffrey Ross gave a yelp of joy and laughed. "That's a good one."

"It was *Abraham* sacrificed Isaac," Meara said dryly.

Stiller took from his coat pocket a limp piece of paper with blurred scrawls all over it. "I wrote this down in the bathtub. It fell in the water," he said. "Maybe I'll say this, if they say stuff about my having sex: 'This pithecanthropus is still erectus.'" He gave Ross a hopeful look. Ross laughed. Stiller read on: "The only time I take Viagra is for an encore." Ross laughed again.

Meara gave a soft sigh.

"What I'd really like to do is tell my story about Groucho Marx," Stiller said, with a questioning look at Ross, who gave him an encouraging laugh in advance. "When I was about eight, during the Depression, my father was an unemployed cabdriver. He came home discouraged one afternoon and took me out to the movies. We saw 'A Night at the Opera.' I laughed so much, I cried. We came home. My mother said, 'No food on the table and you take him to the movies?' Years later, in Hollywood, Groucho invited Anne and me to dinner at his house. He asked us how long we'd been married."

Meara, delighted, took up the anecdote: "We told him twenty years! And Groucho said, 'Why?'"

"Then Groucho showed us, on sixteen-millimeter, 'A Night at the Opera,'" Stiller continued. "So I told him the story of how, in Brooklyn, as a kid, I first saw 'A Night at the Opera.'

'Which theatre?' Groucho asked me.

'The Follies,' I told him.

'No,' Groucho said. 'It was the R.K.O. Bushwick.'"

Jeffrey Ross grinned. "Good story. But isn't it kind of long? You shouldn't feel pressured to perform," he counselled. "When they give you the award, just thank the Friars and Jason Alexander, and stay true to yourself."

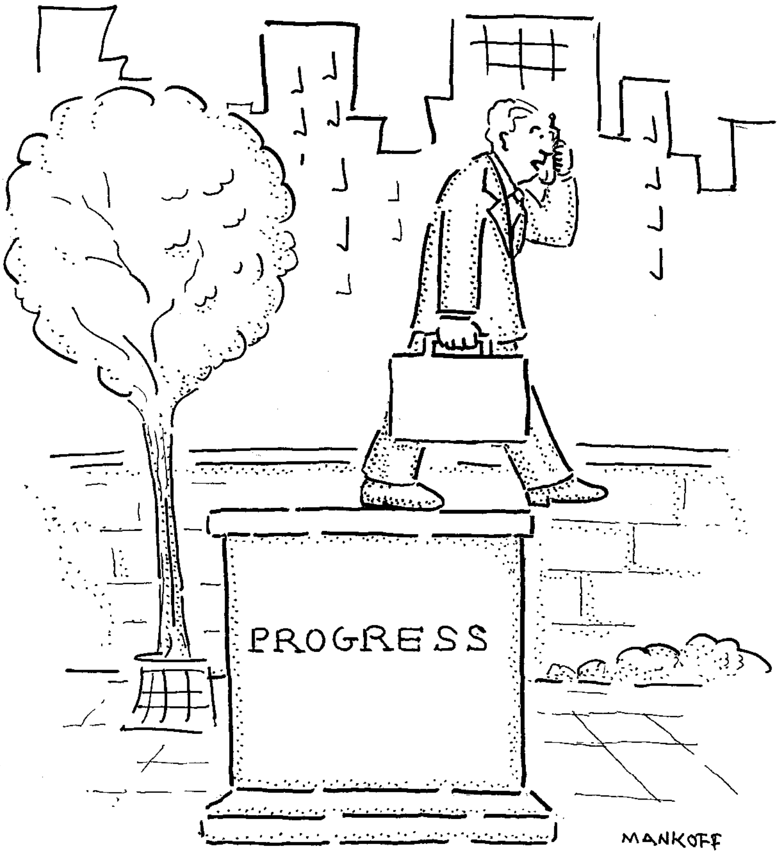
Stiller consulted his damp page again. "How about this, at the end?" he said, and read, "I'm delighted to be honored by the Friars tonight. I'm not a standup comedian. I'm just a simple Mexican-American trying to make it in America."

"That's a good one! We got something," Ross said.

All along, Ross was writing his own standup material for the roast, including a poem about which Jerry the Friars were roasting. It went:

This guy isn't Seinfeld
This guy's Jerry-atric
What—Jerry Orbach wasn't available?
Call Jerry Lewis, he's still around
We'll tell him it's a telethon
They could have had Seinfeld or
Springer, Vale or Van Dyke
Any Jerry'd be better than this crabby
old kike
These roasts are a blast
All kidding aside
I don't mean to be crass
Now that I'm done
I'll go back to kissing your son's ass.

He also wrote a number of standup jokes for himself to tell. One: "Jerry Seinfeld couldn't be here tonight. He had a prior engagement to fuck a model on a pile of cash."



BACKSTAGE at the Hilton on the night of the roast, Ross went over his introductions for the people on the dais. For the New York City Police Commissioner, Howard Safir: "Hold up your plunger so people know who you are exactly." And for Janeane Garofalo: "You're a great actress, but, let's face it, pal. You're responsible for more shitty pictures than Fotomat." Also: "Dr. Ruth is here. Nice to see you again. The last thing she said to me was 'Come on my tits.'"

When the roast got under way, Jerry Stiller, looking lost and puzzled, was ensconced in an armchair on the dais. The three other Stillers sat to his left. The show went on. Freddie Roman, the Dean of the Friars, told the crowd, "Today, we honor Jerry Stiller. Why Jerry Stiller? Simple, we're running out of young Jews." He also said, "Jerry and I have a lot in common—he's been on Broadway, I've been on Broadway, he's been on Anne Meara, I've been on…" To Ben Stiller, he said, "Ben, your father *is* very proud of you. In fact, he's downright jealous. *He* wants to star in movies. *He* wants to win Emmy Awards. *He* wants to come on Cameron Diaz's head."

It turned out that none of the roasters used the words "cunt," "motherfucker," or "cocksucker" in talking about Stiller. After Jeffrey Ross and the Stiller family and a few others got up and did their bits, it was time for Stiller to accept the Roast Award, a crystal statuette of a friar. Somewhat faintly, he told his pithecanthropus-is-still-erectus joke. He wound up with the line about

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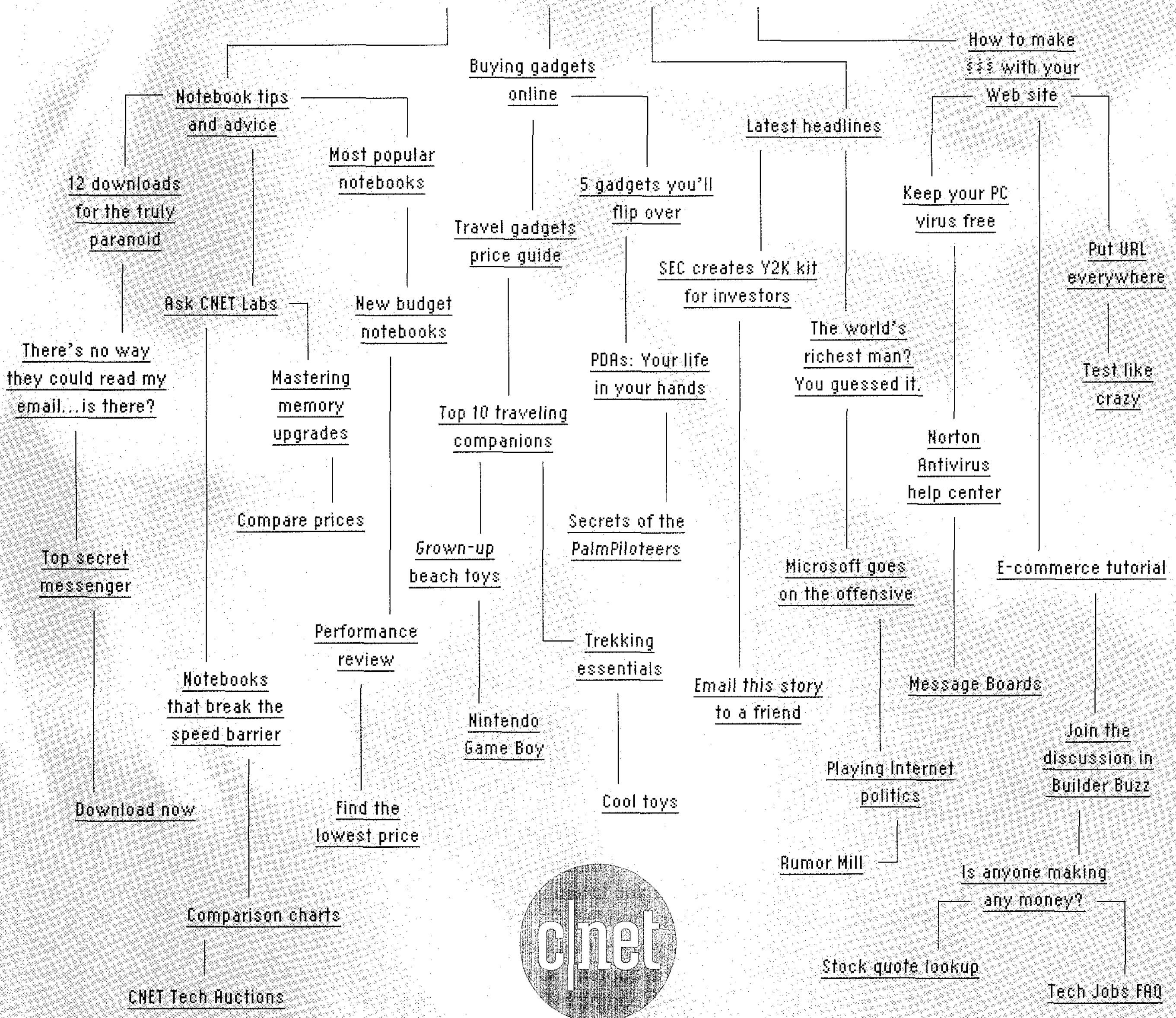
CNET: Tips and advice



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being a "simple Mexican-American trying to make it in America." He did not tell his Groucho story.

Buddy Hackett didn't get to the roast. He had to stay in California to work on his television show. —Lillian Ross

PRESIDENT WARREN

My God, I can see the Washington Monument from the bedroom. That's a sight. I wonder if they can see me from there—President Beatty. "Yes, sir, Mr. President." Sounds good. I like being called Mr. President. Can't wait to get Mike Ovitz on the phone and have him call me Mr. President. Ohmigod! I can't wait. If I do a movie with Spielberg, will he say, "Could you speak your line a little faster, Mr. President"? I guess he'll have to.

There must be a thermostat around here somewhere. First-day stuff. I'll find it tomorrow. Bed's nice. Comfy. I wonder if I can order something to eat. I can't stand it that Reagan was in here. In this very bedroom. Those were dark days. I can't believe that he's considered a great President. Good grief. He will not be the greatest actor-President! HE WILL NOT! HE WILL NOT! HE WILL NOT! Hey, my first phone call.

"Are you all right, sir?"

"Of course."

"I heard you screaming."

"How could you have heard me screaming?"

"Well, we monitor every room in the White House."

"And why is that?"

"We check for unauthorized persons."

"WELL, WHO THE HELL WOULD BE IN HERE? MOLLY RINGWALD?"

"Sorry, sir."

"So don't monitor my bedroom."

"Yes, sir, Mr. President."

"Thanks, Tom, and say hello to your wife, Mandy, and your three kids—Julia, nine, Harley, seven, and Keli, four."

"Gee, sir, you even got the spellings right."

"Tom, one thing. On our trip to China next month, see if you can work it out so we stop in Aspen."

"I'll have your press secretary discuss that with you, Mr. President."

"Yes, have her call me."

"Him."

"Him? My press secretary is a man? That's disappointing. No biggie. However, from now on I would like to call him my press personal assistant."

"I'll try, sir."

"In fact, all those secretaries should be called personal assistants. It's less demeaning."

"What secretaries, sir?"

"You know, like the Secretary of State, Secretary of Commerce, those gals."

"Sir, all those secretaries are men."

"Would you say that again?"

"All those secretaries are men."

"You mean I'm walking into a situation where I've got fourteen secretaries and *they're all guys*?"

"You should know that, sir. You appointed them."

"*I* didn't. My *people* did."

"Yes, sir."

"Tom, that reminds me. Between us, and whoever else is listening in, I don't want to see an intern. No interns. Not one intern. *Ever.*"

"Yes, sir."

"One last thing, Tom. I think it would be good to be seen at church. I think that's a positive statement for the American people."

"That sounds very good, sir."

"So would you have them save a pew over at the Buddhist temple on Saturday?"

"Yes, sir . . . Sir, Mr. Jack Nicholson is calling."

"Put him through. . . . Hi, Jack!"

"Hey there, ol' buddy! I just wanna say one thing: *Poontang.*"

"Those days are over, Jack."

"Buddy, I'm calling because of that thing we talked about."

"What was that again?"

"The Supreme Court Justice thing."

"But look, Jack, I told you that wasn't a sure thing."

"Yeah, I know. But, still, it would be a thrill just to be nominated."

"Tom, are you listening?"

"Yes, Mr. President."

"Would you see that Jack gets an audition for the Supreme Court?"

"Yes, sir. Good night, sir."

"Oh, and Tom, where's Annette?"

"Ms. Bening is lying next to you on the bed, sir."

"Oh. Hi, honey. How does it feel to be the first lady?"

"Oh, Warren, you know I don't believe that." —Steve Martin

REFLECTIONS

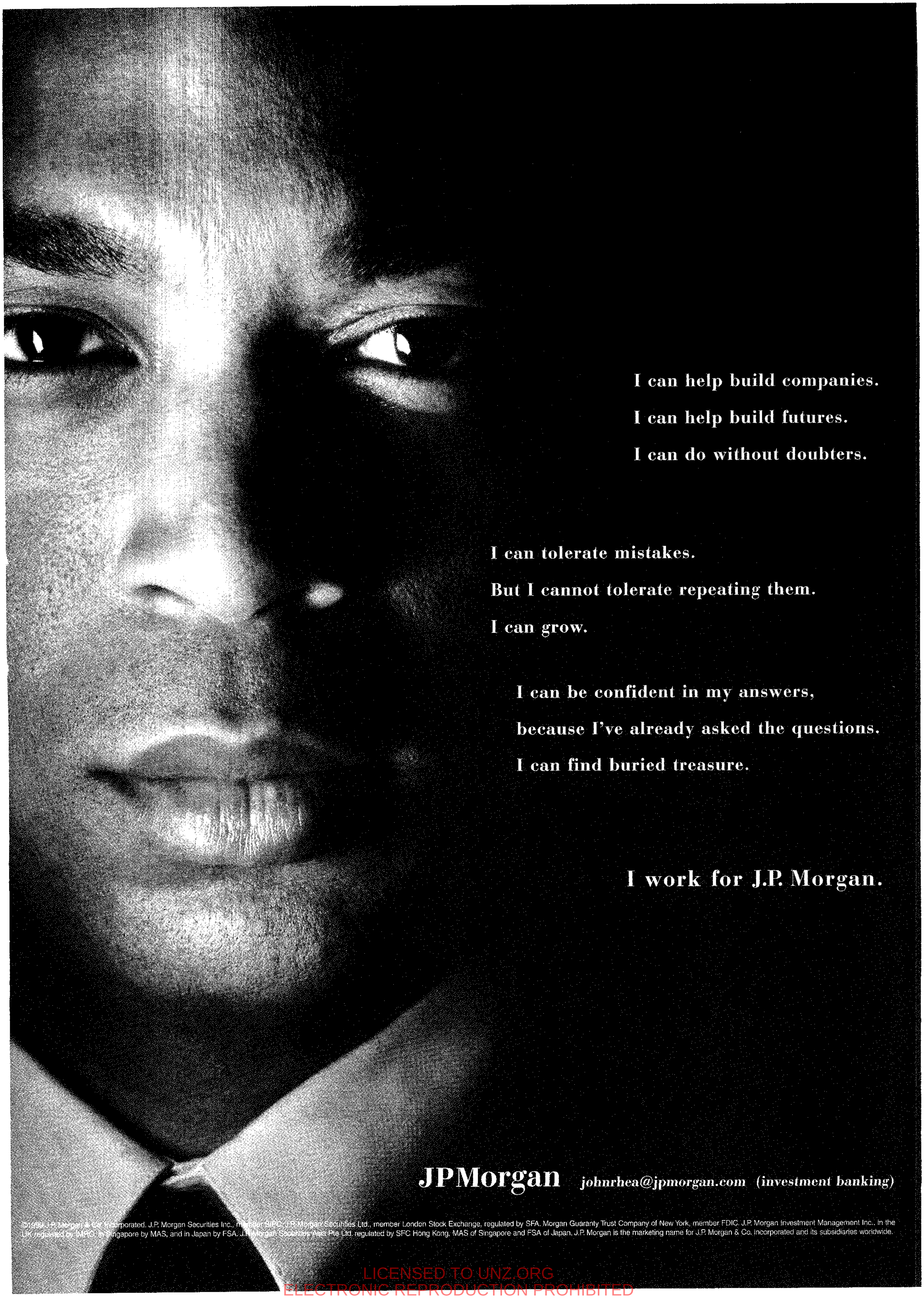
Ron Reagan reacts to "Dutch."

Previous Reagan biographies have presented my father as one of two stock characters: the Cowboy Hero or the Fortunate Fool. In Edmund Morris's "Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan," for all its fictive excursions, I finally meet, in print, the contradictory man I know.

This latest portrayal of my father's strange and remarkable life has been received in my family like a rock hurled into a shallow pond. The offspring of older parents are especially vulnerable to an unsettling realization: our parents' lives were apparently in full swing well before our arrival. More unnerving yet is the revelation that the emotional crux of a parent's life was encountered before we were born.

My friendship with Morris disqualifies any critique of his book, but a couple of elements in his meticulously researched portrait struck me with particular force. The first is that my father was once deeply in love with a woman who was not my mother, and that this already emotionally reticent man was irrecoverably wounded when she turned away. In photographs from the late forties through the early fifties, you can see his crooked smile, once unabashed, transform itself into the thinner line I recall from childhood. One of the operative mythologies of my father's second family (my family) paints his first marriage, to Jane Wyman, as aberrant, coerced, its dissolution having a revivifying effect. Reading Morris's pages, one has the contrary impression, of an iceberg upending, rolling its wrecked parapets beneath the waves, leaving only a blank snowfield to face the sky. Who was he before she left? Before their infant daughter died?

No less affecting, though not in the



I can help build companies.
I can help build futures.
I can do without doubters.
I can tolerate mistakes.
But I cannot tolerate repeating them.
I can grow.
I can be confident in my answers,
because I've already asked the questions.
I can find buried treasure.
I work for J.P. Morgan.
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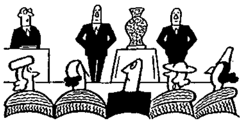
least surprising, is the author's infatuation with my father's physical presence. The cover photo, down to the gently expressive fingers of the waving hand, captures an almost balletic grace. Morris devotes much space to my father's broad shoulders, fluid gait, and athletic grit. All true. You'll never meet a man with more physical courage or a person more at home in his body.

In my father, Morris suggests, emotional turmoil often coincided with bodily insult. Morris writes of the viral pneumonia that kept him from his daughter's crib when she was dying, and of the shattered femur that accompanied his divorce from Wyman. I recalled the ulcer that cropped up, years later, when, as governor of California, he sent a man to his execution. Later still, an unfortunate number of unfortunate decisions seem to have been made between hospital sheets. One senses a hidden channel connecting a cloistered inner world to the casually seductive equipoise of a body in love with movement and exertion.

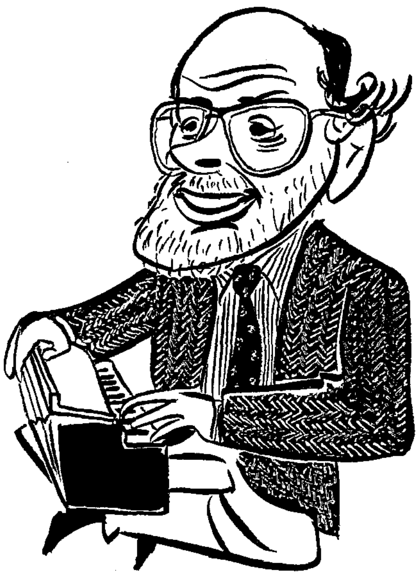
No surprise, then, that those seeking communion with my father found it most readily in the physical realm. In my case, this communion often occurred on the various front lawns of childhood, when he would be coaxed from his study to take the field as quarterback for both teams in our neighborhood games of touch football. There was an understanding between us, never spoken, that, when he took his turn on my team, in order to avoid any hint of favoritism he would send the ball my way only as a last resort. And so I see him surveying a scramble of children's bodies, finding one and then another gangly combatant entangled, until, finally, our eyes meet, and, seeing me breaking clear toward the sycamore that marked the goal line, he delivers the ball into my hands. I cannot recall an errant throw. —Ron Reagan

ON THE BLOCK

At an auction of Beat belongings, an item with a life of its own.



In a memorable phrase in "Kaddish," his 1959 account of his mother's unravelling, Allen Ginsberg wrote of "all the accumulations of life, that wear us out." On October 7th, the storied mementos (including three incarnations of the famous Uncle Sam hat) that never managed to wear out the indefatigable poet were put up for auction at Sotheby's. This dispersal of Ginsberg's possessions was in the spirit of his Buddhist practice, but the immediate purpose of the sale was to help the Allen Ginsberg Trust recover from a mammoth tax hit.



Allen Ginsberg

The auction was also intended to benefit Ginsberg's heirs, including Peter Orlovsky, his companion for four decades. Just before the auction began, Orlovsky appeared at Sotheby's front desk and identified himself to the two polite ladies who were checking in bidders as "Mrs. Allen Ginsberg." In a sale of items freighted with nostalgic associations—a copy of the Beatles' "Live at the BBC" inscribed by Paul McCartney "To Allen, thanks for the lessons!"—there was one item that, as Ginsberg's longtime secretary Bob Rosenthal explains, made potential buyers "go *ohhhh*": Lot No. 86, the poet's harmonium.

Bought by Orlovsky in Benares in 1962 for about fifty dollars, the lap-sized lacquered wooden organ with a hand-pumped bellows was as iconically inseparable from the poet as Dylan was from his harmonica. Most people referred to it as "that squeezebox," Rosenthal says. Generations of young admirers helped the poet schlepp the keyboard around in a salesman's sample case covered with V.I.P. passes from Dylan's "Rolling Thunder" tour. Ginsberg's primary musical collaborator, Steven Taylor, says that the attraction of the instrument was enhanced when Ginsberg learned that William Blake sang his "Songs of Innocence" in friends' parlors, accompanying himself on little pump organs. The instrument allowed Ginsberg to become a one-man, two-chord exponent of the bardic tradition.

During the Vietnam War, Ginsberg suggested to William Buckley that dispatching five hundred thousand Americans to Vietnam with harmoniums would "probably get better results." The harmonium also made a memorable appearance at the trial of the Chicago Seven, when Ginsberg was called as a witness for the defense. As the poet was cross-examined about the press conference where Jerry Rubin announced that a Yippie "Festival of Life" would take place at the 1968 Democratic Convention, a surreal exchange occurred.

Mr. Weinglass [defense attorney]: Mr. Ginsberg, I show you an object marked 150 for identification, and I ask you to examine that object.

The Witness: Yes. (Plays C chord.)

Mr. Foran [prosecutor]: Your Honor, that is enough. I object to it, Your Honor. I think that it is outrageous for counsel to—

The Court: You asked him to examine it and instead of that he played a tune on it.

Mr. Foran: I mean, counsel is so clearly—

The Court: I sustain the objection.

Mr. Foran: —talking about things that have no conceivable materiality to this case, and it is improper, Your Honor.

The Witness: It adds spirituality to the case, sir.

The Court: Will you remain quiet, sir.

The Witness: I am sorry.

The Court: My obligation is to protect you, but my obligation is to see that you act in accordance with the law.

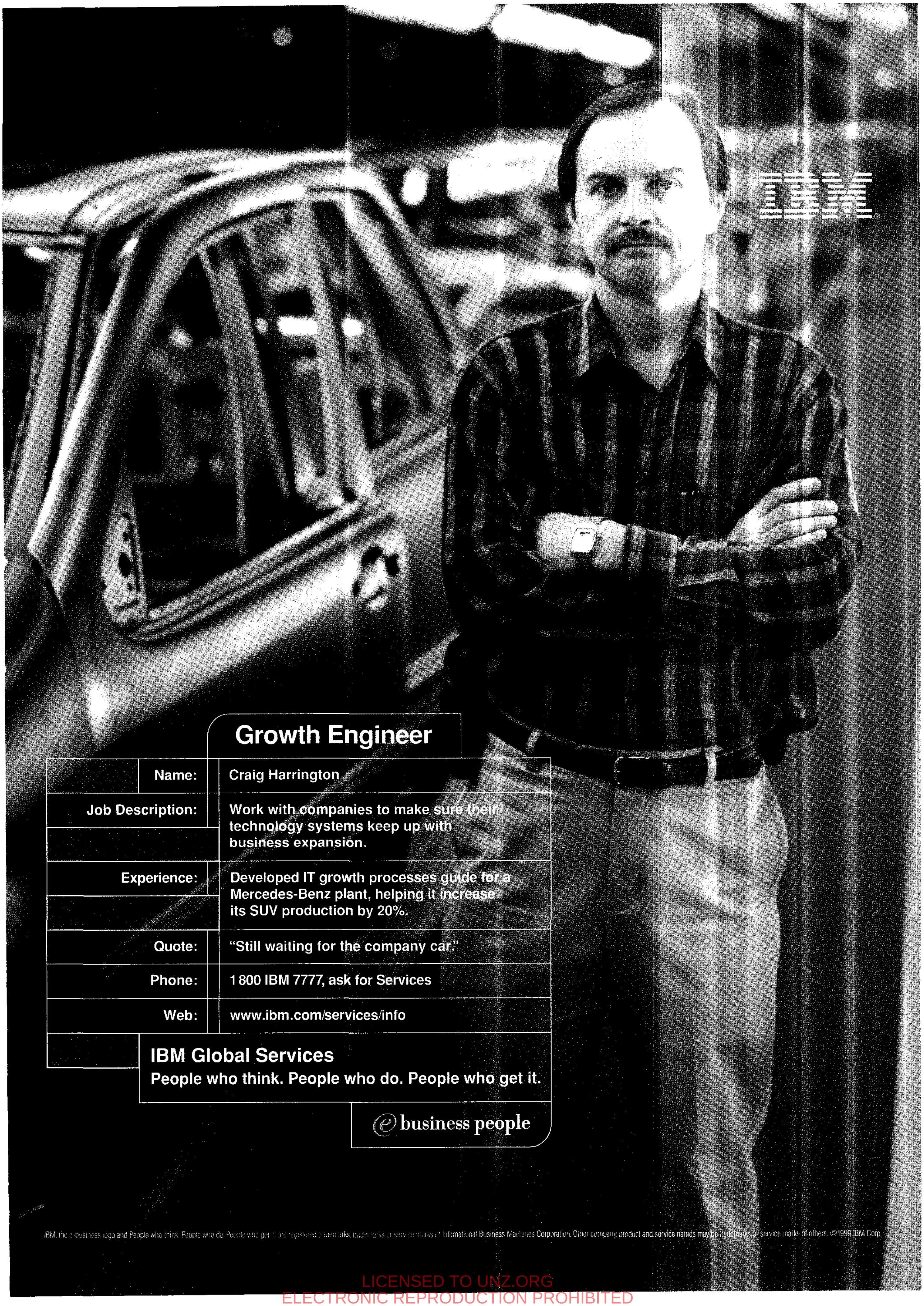
The Witness: I agree, sir.

Mr. Weinglass: Having examined that, could you identify it for the Court and the jury? . . . .

The Witness: It is an instrument known as the harmonium, which I used at the press conference at the Americana Hotel.

With a bar-mitzvah boy's wobbly fix on pitch, Ginsberg was no born crooner, but there was communicative joy in his music. Hal Willner, who produced Ginsberg's boxed set, "Holy Soul Jelly Roll," said he's glad the harmonium, which went for twelve thousand six hundred and fifty dollars, to the filmmaker Obie Benz, "will be somewhere where it might be used, not taking its place in the Smithsonian next to Archie Bunker's chair."

—Steve Silberman



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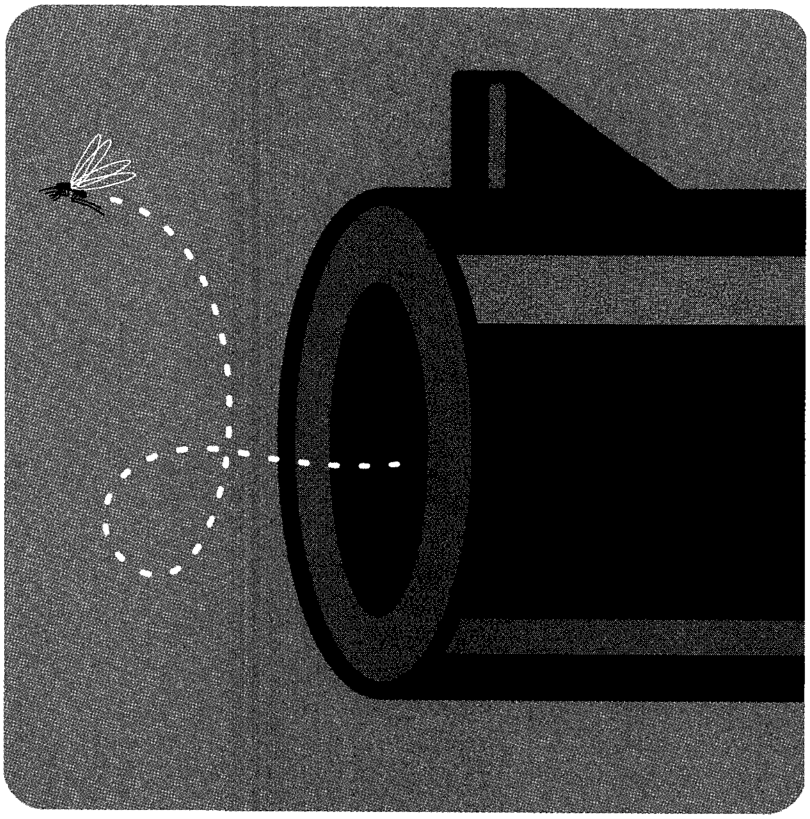
DISPATCH

WEST NILE MYSTERY

How did it get here? The C.I.A. would like to know.

BY RICHARD PRESTON

SINCE the end of August, a brain virus that is now believed to be a previously unknown variant of the West Nile virus has killed at least five people around New York City and its suburbs. This has created a stir in the national news media—and a whiff of concern within the C.I.A. that the outbreak might have been an act of bioterrorism—but the main effect of the outbreak in humans has been quiet: thousands of New Yorkers may have had West Nile virus replicating in their brains this summer without knowing it. In most people, the West Nile illness feels like a mild flu. Humans catch it from the bite of an infected mosquito. You might get a headache and a backache and the blahs; just another summer bug. Usually, the illness lasts from three to six days, and people recover quickly, without lasting effects. But in young children, the elderly, and people with weak immune systems West Nile can turn into encephalitis—an inflammation of the brain. The brain becomes red and puffs up inside the skull. These victims may get tremors—their muscles may become uncontrollably weak—and they can have seizures, fall into a coma, stop breathing, and die.



Last spring, long before the outbreak, an Iraqi defector declared that Saddam Hussein had told him of plans to use the virus as a bioweapon.

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

The West Nile virus was first identified by virologists in 1937, in the West Nile district of Uganda, along the Albert Nile near the border with the Congo, where it was making people sick. West Nile virus is a traveller. Mosquitoes are its main carriers and birds are its main hosts; they are its deep reservoir in nature. It has been found all over east Africa, in western India, in Australia (where one of its close relations is known as Kunjin), and in Egypt and the Middle East. About forty per cent of the people who live in the Nile Delta in Egypt have been infected with West Nile at some point in their lives. Although the virus stages occasional outbreaks in people, the real outbreaks are happening in birds, and people are bystanders caught in the crossfire—bitten by chance by an infected mosquito. The virus also gets into ticks. From the point of view of the West Nile virus, the human species is of less consequence than a tick. In a manner of speaking, West Nile doesn't even know we exist. But when West Nile moves with the birds there is splatter damage among humans. Birds occasionally carry West Nile into Eastern Europe during their annual migrations out of Africa. Right now, there is a major outbreak of what is believed to be the West Nile virus in southern Russia, around the cities of Volgograd and Rostov-on-Don. There are reports that some six hundred people have been taken ill, and at least thirty-two have died. American scientists have been trying to persuade Russian scientists to send them samples of tissue and blood from the Russian outbreak, so that they can compare the New York strain with the Russian strain. It might show that the New York strain somehow came from Russia, perhaps travelling by airplane in the bloodstream of an infected Russian who ended up in Queens and was bitten by a mosquito there, and the mosquito then passed it to a bird. So far, the Russians haven't sent any samples.

Until this summer, the West Nile virus had never been seen in the Western Hemisphere. Some virus experts think that the leap of West Nile virus into North America—if this is indeed what has happened—is one of the most important biological events to occur in the world of the viruses in this century. For one thing, until now the virus has generally not been fatal to its avian hosts. For another, the outbreak reveals the mobility of viruses and their propensity to cross continents. The experts have no idea how the virus got to New York and little idea where it's going. Possibly, an infected bird somehow flew across the ocean—or hitched a ride on a ship, or was imported legally or illegally. Or perhaps an infected mosquito got here on a plane. The virus may now be headed down the eastern seaboard of the United States for the winter, travel-

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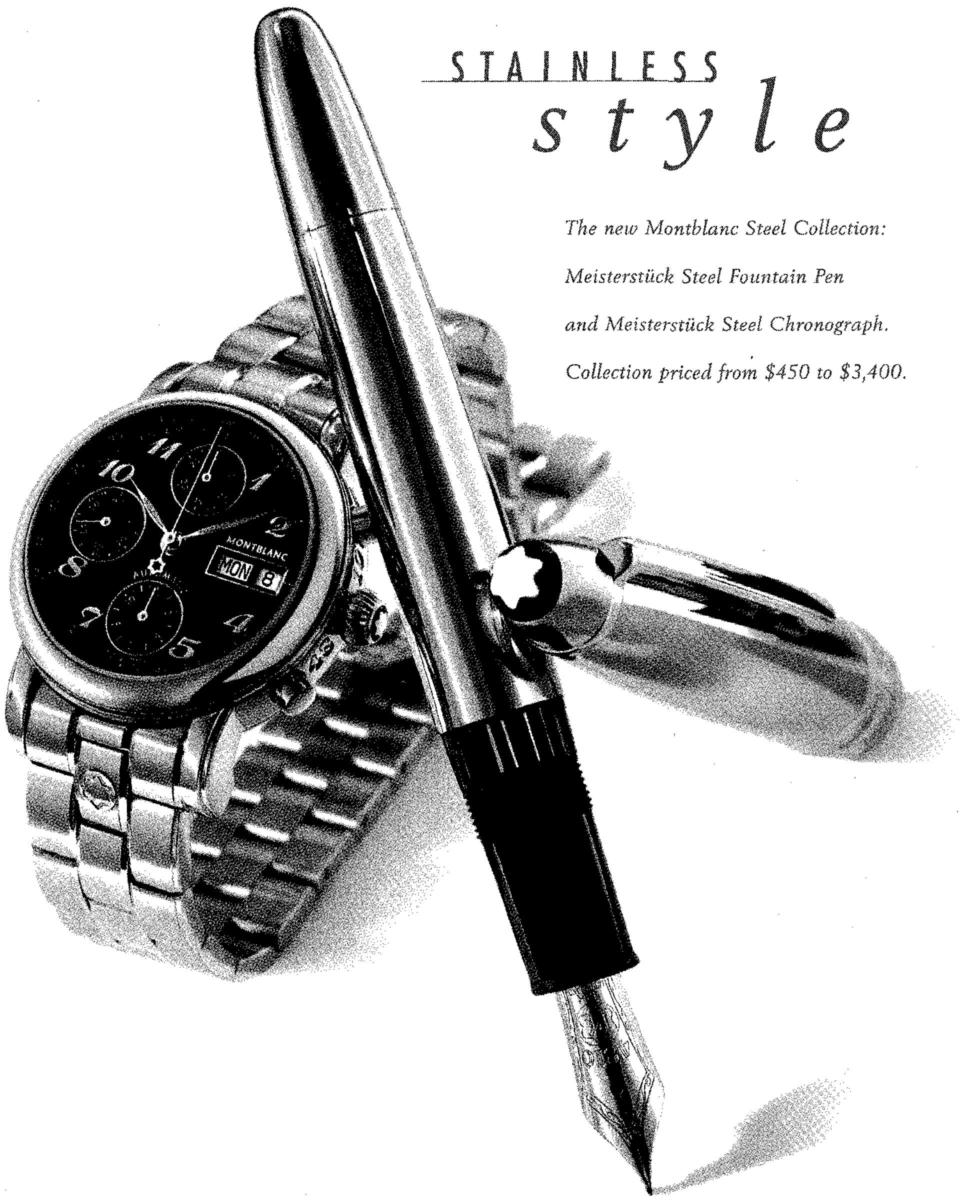

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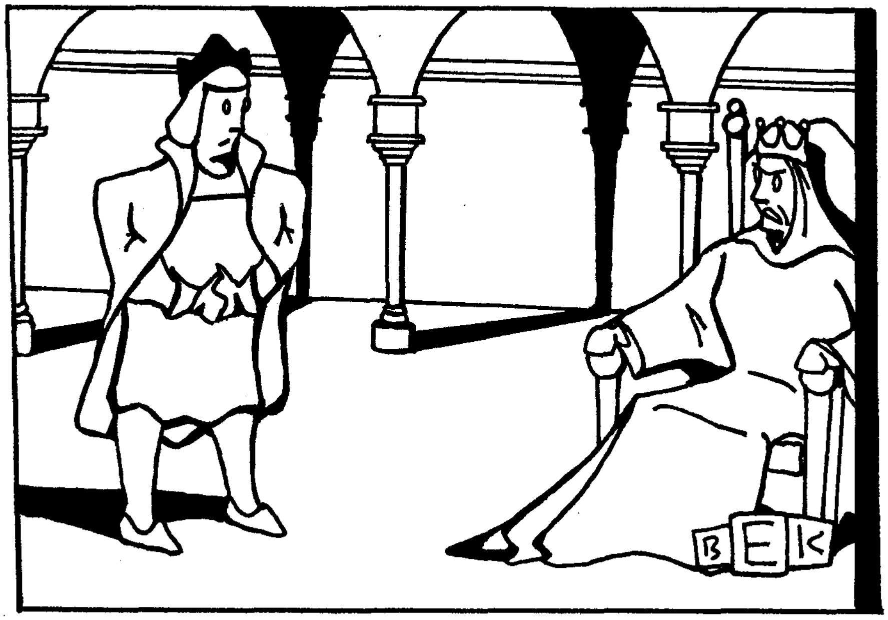

"Just tell me about the new continent. I don't give a damn what you've discovered about yourself."

ling inside birds. In late June or early July, the virus apparently showed up in birds in the Whitestone area of northern Queens and in the South Bronx. The birds caught it from an urban mosquito, *Culex pipiens*—Latin for "chirping bug"—commonly known as the house mosquito. This mosquito breeds all over the world in polluted water. Where the mosquitoes of New York City got the West Nile virus is unknown.

In mid-August, Dr. Tracey McNamara, a veterinary pathologist with the Wildlife Conservation Society, at the Bronx Zoo, began hearing reports of dead birds all around New York City. Then she noticed dozens of dead and sick crows around the zoo. "I'm sitting there saying, 'It's raining crows,' " she recalls. "The sick ones were neurologic—they couldn't fly, they had trouble balancing. They were sitting there with tremors." Dr. McNamara performed necropsies, and when she opened the birds' skulls she found that they'd had brain hemorrhages; she also found lesions on their hearts. Then, the day after Labor Day, there was a big die-off of birds at the zoo. A number of South American flamingos and cormorants died, and a bald eagle developed head tremors and died. Dr. McNamara sensed that an unknown virus was killing the birds. She already suspected it was being passed by mosquitoes, and she feared that it could be lethal to humans. She began taking extra precautions: she handled the birds only with special equipment, and opened them up in a filtered-air safety cabinet. She notified health authorities and sent them samples for analysis.

At roughly the same time, Dr. Deborah Asnis, at the Flushing Hospital Medical Center, in Queens, was treating two elderly patients who were dying of an apparent encephalitis virus, but she couldn't diagnose it. Dr. Asnis brought it to the attention of doctors at the New York City Department of Health, who sent samples of human brain tissue to a laboratory of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Fort Collins, Colorado, where Dr. Duane Gubler, the director of the Division of Vector-Borne Infectious Diseases, made a tentative identification of St. Louis encephalitis virus. That virus lives in birds and mosquitoes in the South and Midwest, and had never been seen in New York. On Friday, September 3rd, city officials learned that the C.D.C. believed that the virus was St. Louis encephalitis, and just two hours later Mayor Rudolph Giuliani ordered trucks and a helicopter to begin spraying insecticides over neighborhoods in northern Queens. The spraying eventually involved five helicopters, and was carried out all over the city and in many suburbs. The chief of the Mayor's Office of Emergency Management, Jerome Hauer, bought half a million cans and bottles of Off! and other insect repellents on behalf of New York City. He ended up cornering nearly the entire supply of insect repellent in the United States. The city handed out the bug repellent for free. Hauer also is in charge of New York City's preparations for a bioterror event. A bioterror event is the deliberate release of a biological weapon, such as anthrax or smallpox, by a terrorist—a possibility that has city officials very concerned, and they've been having planning sessions and staging simulated terror exercises. It may be that their preparations for a bioterror event fortuitously speeded up the city's response to the outbreak of the brain virus.

Then two groups of scientists almost simultaneously discovered that the virus wasn't St. Louis encephalitis virus but West Nile—or something close to West Nile. One group was led by Dr. Ian Lipkin, of the Emerging Diseases Laboratory at the University of California at Irvine, who was studying bits of brain tissue from people who had died in New York. The other group was led by Duane Gubler, of the C.D.C. lab in Colorado. Both Lipkin and Gubler were attempting to decode the DNA of the virus to determine exactly what the virus is. It might be given a new name, Lipkin told me early last week: "We could call it the Hudson River virus. We won't call it the Queens virus. People don't like to have viruses named after the places they live." Then, at the end of the week, Lipkin announced that he believed the virus was indeed a new strain, and that it is most closely related to the West Nile virus and its relative the Australian Kunjin virus.

The mystery of how a West Nile-like virus got to New York City has been troubling the Central Intelligence Agency. At the headquarters of the C.I.A., in Langley, Virginia, there is a group of analysts and officers who concern themselves with biological weapons—the C.I.A.'s bioweapons-analysis section. The section is run by a senior biologist who has had firsthand experience with some of the world's most dangerous viruses, including the

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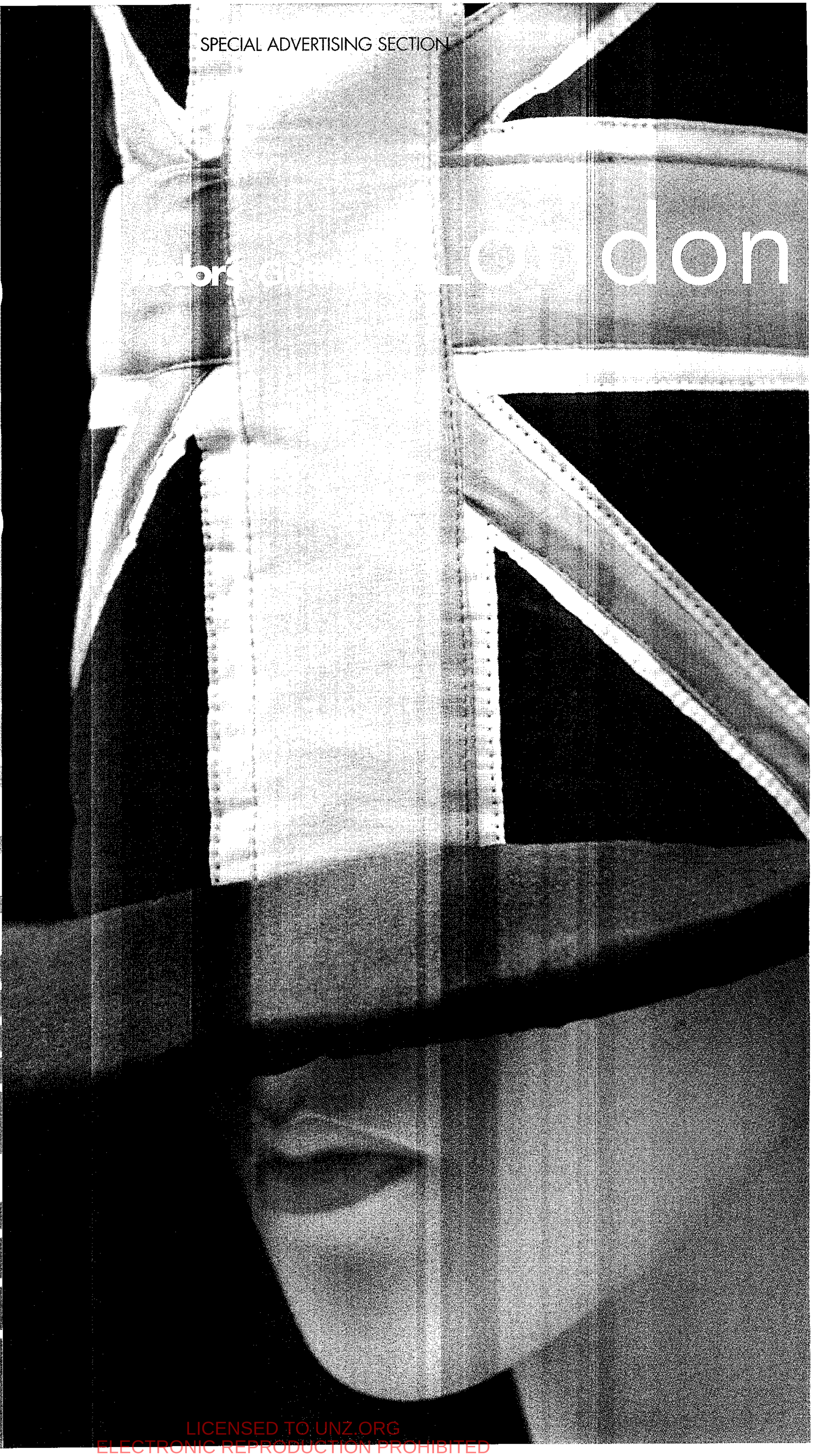

THE MILLENNIUM G

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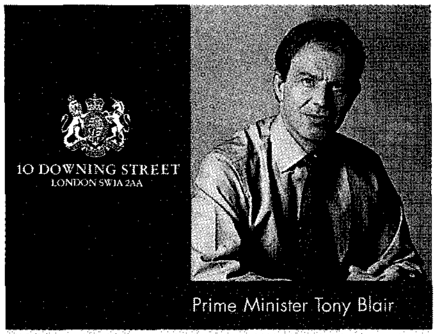


Prime Minister Tony Blair

The Prime Minister

I am delighted, once again, to provide a contribution to the yearly special feature on Great Britain in *The New Yorker*.

The United Kingdom and the United States are bound firmly in friendship and respect. This relationship is developed, nurtured, and improved by contact between people, whether through business, culture, sport, or simply the pleasure of visiting each other's country.

Beyond the historic sights and rich traditions of Britain, visitors will be able to see Britain's centerpiece of Y2K festivities, The Millennium Dome in Greenwich. The Dome, part of a nationwide programme of events called the U.K. Millennium Experience, will be officially opened by Her Majesty The Queen on New Year's Eve. Spectacular exhibits, theme zones, and live performances are just a few of the celebrations of British technology and ideas on display in the Dome.

This, combined with economic vigour, has added to our offering of world-class restaurants, shops, hotels, and attractions, and created a new sense of dynamism throughout the country. First time and return visitors will experience the aspects of Britain of which we are so proud both the traditional and new; from the engineering marvel of the Millennium Dome, with its twenty acres of enclosed space, to the haunting majesty of Stonehenge; from our historic market towns to the Tate Gallery expansion. Truly, there is something for everyone.

The cities of London and New York both have long traditions as financial centres. Their influence in monetary, social, industrial, and cultural spheres is felt around the world. Whether it is a play opening on Broadway or the West End, the closing prices on the London or New York Stock Exchanges, the newest fashions or corporate mergers, the attention focused on our two nations is unrivalled. Such rich, common experiences make our relationship unique and important.

I sincerely hope that we can welcome many more of you so you can see the Best of Britain firsthand. I would also like to invite the many business visitors from the U.S. to extend their stays and get to know us better. I am sure all our visitors will enjoy themselves.

Tony Blair

Everyone is talking about the resurgence of swinging-London. It is now, as one publication recently proclaimed, "the coolest, hottest city in the world." And as millennium fever grips the capital and front-page news stories, it is now, more than ever, the place to be.

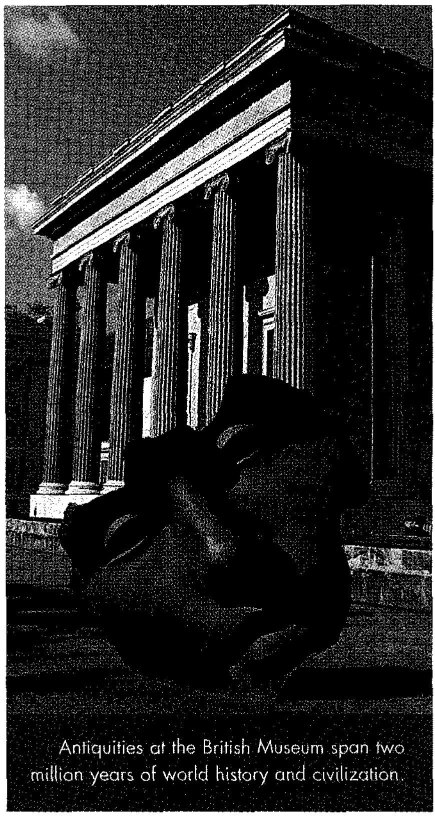
London's chefs have become superstars. Its fashion designers have invaded the citadel of Paris: John Galliano, Alexander McQueen, and Stella McCartney hold the reins at Dior, Givenchy, and Chloé respectively. Avant-garde artists have caused waves at the august Royal Academy of Arts. The city's raging after-hours scene is packed with music mavens ready to embrace the Next Big Thing. And, the theatre continues its tradition of radical productions including those at the Royal National Theatre.

FUTURE FORWARD: LONDON Y2K

London is poised on tiptoe to embrace the turn of the century. The epicenter of the celebrations, the **Millennium Dome** in Greenwich, is due to open to the public on January 1st. With fourteen themed zones inside taking visitors forward into the world of the twenty-first century, this extravaganza could prove peerless in its foresight. If you head out to the borough of Greenwich before the Dome opens, drop in on the **Millennium Experience Visitor Centre** with its graphic installations, videos, and interactive monitors designed for the visitors. Also going up on the south side of the Thames is the **British Airways London Eye**, the world's highest observation wheel.

Opening in May 2000, the new **Tate Gallery of Modern Art** will house a huge number of works, formerly hidden from public view due to lack of space at the Tate's Millbank Gallery. Every museum in London, in fact, is engaged in a whirlwind of activity, and it will be even more so with the opening of the world's first museum dedicated to wine. Spread over two acres, **Vinopolis, City of Wine** promises multimedia tours of the world's wine cultures, tastings, wine shops, an art gallery, restaurants, and a wine school.

The historic **British Museum** is



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Antiquities at the British Museum span two million years of world history and civilization.

Cover © Cralle/Image Bank

Supplement's text adapted from "Fodor's 2000 London Gold Guide"

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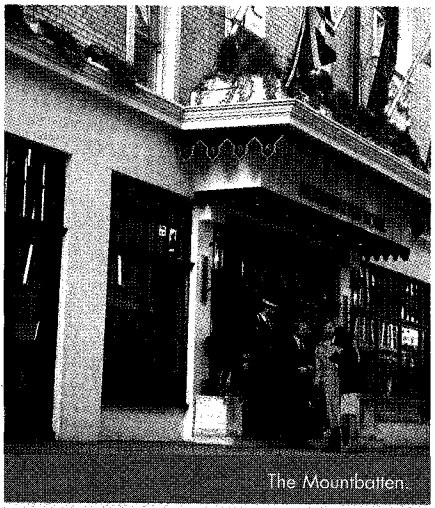

The Mountbatten.

APPLAUSE, APPLAUSE

If you agree with a certain English bard that the play's the thing, there is no better way to take in the remarkable London theatre and its wealth of onstage performances than by a stay at one of the centrally located, elegant **Radisson Edwardian Hotels.**

Convenient to the London theatre district, the hotels, including The Berkshire, The Mountbatten, The Marlborough, and The Hampshire, offer luxury services and opulent English country house-style accommodations. Radisson Edwardian's sister company, Centre Stage, offers the widest range of theatrical entertainment in London, bringing more than a hundred-thousand avid theatre enthusiasts to the capital each year. Indeed, Radisson Edwardian Hotels are the first choice of American theatre groups travelling to London for a week or more of theatre and fine dining. There is no easier, more convenient access to the best of the West End's plays, musicals, opera, ballet and concerts, both rock and classical. Gourmet restaurants in each hotel. Cozy, historic ambience. Distinctive, antique appointments blended with state of the art conveniences. Access to the best seats in the house throughout the West End.

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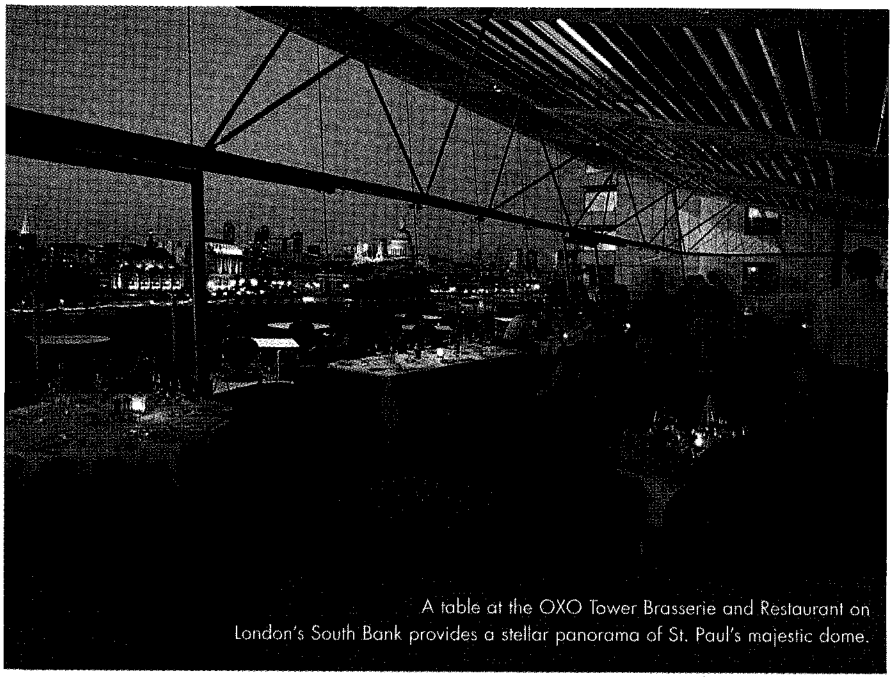
putting on a bold new face on the Elgin Marbles and their disputed ownership. These controversial treasures are now shown in a grand setting in the Parthenon Galleries, and their history has been brought up-to-date with a tactile, interactive display. In fact, the whole museum will be rejuvenated with the magnificent glassed Great Court palazzo entrance (projected completion: autumn 2000).



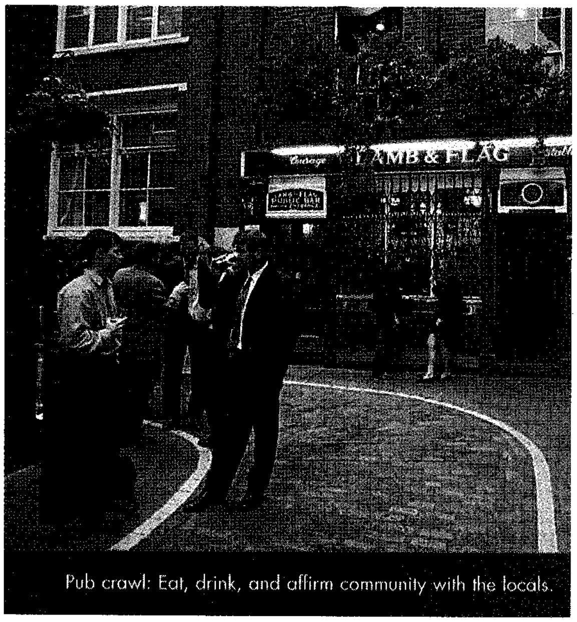
A table at the OXO Tower Brasserie and Restaurant on London's South Bank provides a stellar panorama of St. Paul's majestic dome.

© Kelly/Mooney

And finally, polished and ready to greet the world after four years of restorative work, the **Albert Memorial** in Kensington Gardens was revealed in its newly gilded glory in late 1998. The monument designed by George Gilbert Scott had not been seen in its full glory since 1915, when it was given a dull coat of black so that it would not provide a moonlit beacon during the First World War, attracting enemy zeppelins to nearby Kensington Palace. Relaunched in 1998 amid a fanfare of floodlit fireworks, the monument was declared magnificent by the Queen. Like the Albert Memorial, all of London is swept up in the momentum of the new millennium.

FOOD, GLORIOUS FOOD

No longer would Somerset Maugham be justified in warning, "If you want to eat well in England, have breakfast three times a day." 'Cool Britannia' is now one of the hottest places around for restaurants. After feasting on Mod Brit cuisine, visit one of London's fabulous pubs for a nightcap.



Pub crawl: Eat, drink, and affirm community with the locals.

© Kelly/Mooney

Maison Novelli. Jean-Christophe Novelli is one of the heroes of the Mod Brit movement, and his restaurant has drawn gastronomes from the day it opened. Head Chef Richard Guest gets the juices flowing with such favorites as confit of goose neck stuffed with foie gras or the famed pig trotter stuffed "following the mood of the day." Finish it all off with a quince Tatin with walnut ice cream or caramelized rice pudding with fresh rhubarb compote. *29 Clerkenwell Green, EC1 R ODU; Telephone: 011 44 207 25 6606. Reservations are essential. AE, DC, MC, V. Tube: Farringdon.*

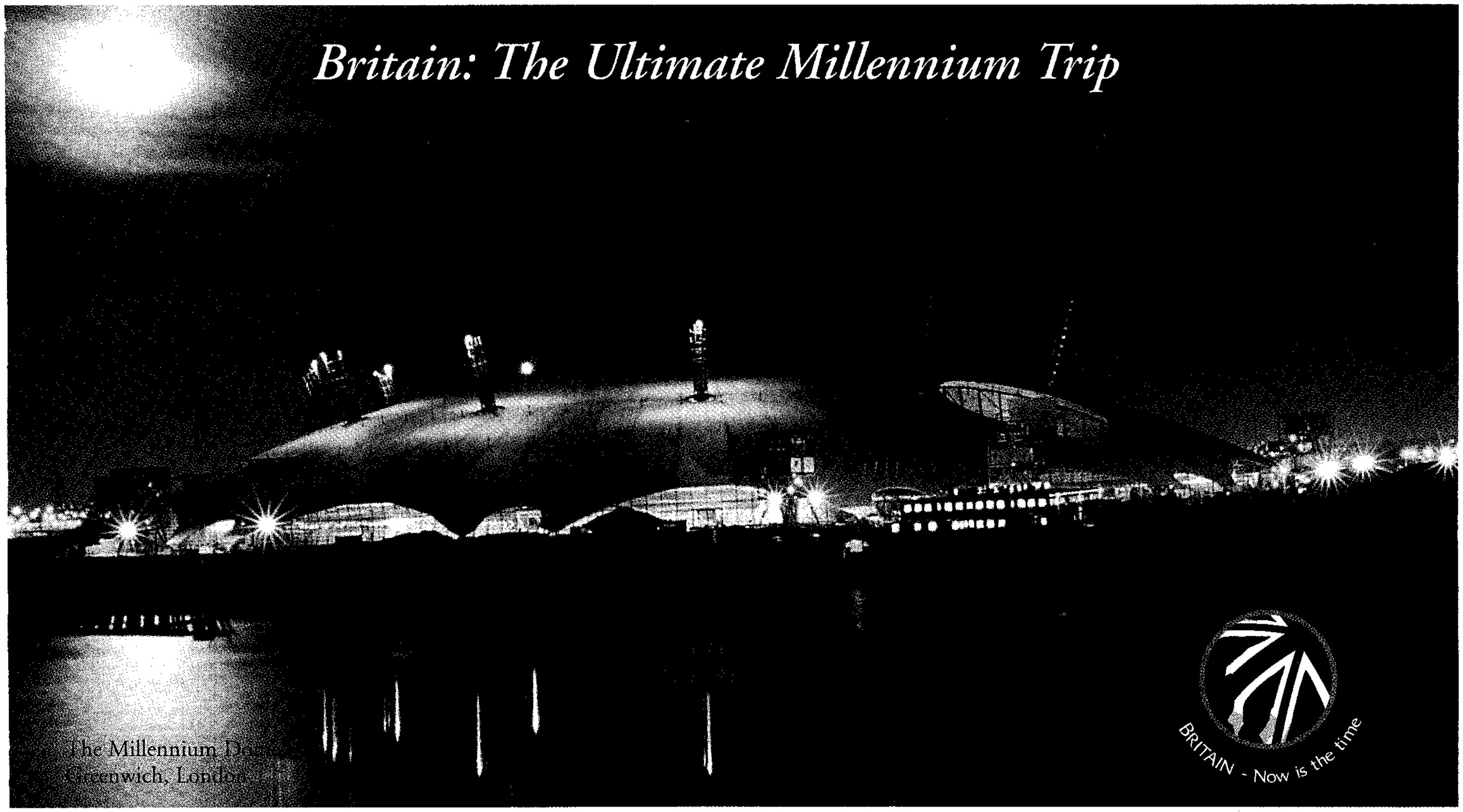
OXO Tower Brasserie and Restaurant. How delightful it is for London finally to get a room with a view and what a view it is. On the eighth floor of the beautifully revived OXO Tower Wharf building (near the South Bank Centre) this elegant space features Euro-Asia food with trendy

GETTING AROUND THE BRITISH ISLES

▶ Whether one prefers a cavernous castle or cozy cottage, the British Isles has it all. Worth a sojourn to the Emerald Isle is the Ashford Castle in County Mayo, or the Dromoland in County Clare. Typical Irish bed & breakfasts abound, in the country and in cities, a morning repast that includes Irish bacon, black and white pudding, and more. For further information, call the **Irish Tourist Board** at 800-223-6470.

▶ When traveling to the British Isles in the fall, whether to explore an Irish Castle or to take in a London stage performance, preparedness is key. **Tilley Endurables'** winter hat is a must-have. With its water-repellent, all wool exterior, earflaps, and tuckaway forehead protector, it may be the world's best multiuse hat. And the velvety interior also ensures that it is every bit as comfortable. For more information on Tilley's full line of travel gear or to request a catalog, call 800-363-8737.

▶ For more information on travel to the Britain, call the **British Tourist Authority** at 800-462-2748, or visit **www.travelbritain.org.**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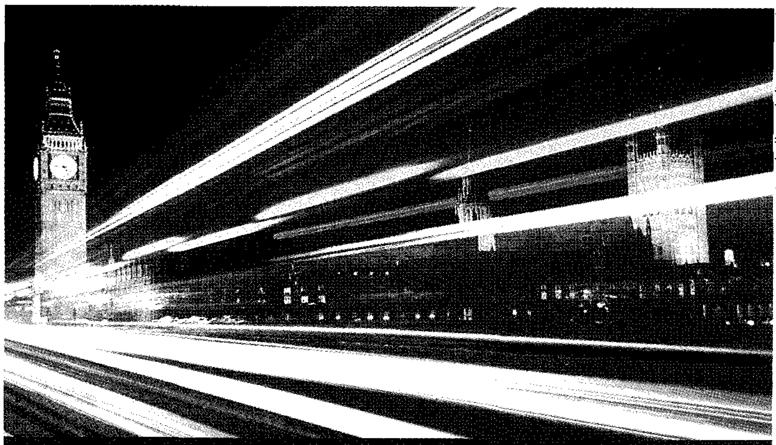
OFF-SEASON HOLIDAYS

For vacationers who'd rather enjoy the pomp of London without the circumstance of huge crowds, **British Airways** offers Holidays Value Plus, a program of air-inclusive, off-season European vacation packages at prices considerably lower than those of summer.

One of the most interesting, "A Taste of London," features roundtrip airfare between the United States and London, accommodations that include a daily continental breakfast at a centrally located hotel, and transfers between the hotel and the airport. In addition, the package includes an open-top bus tour of Britain's capital. Prices start as low as $489 per person double occupancy, depending on travel date, selection of hotel, length of stay, and departure city. Adults can save an additional fifty dollars per person by purchasing a London or Britain vacation at least ninety days in advance. For further information, visit **www.britishairways.com/vacations.**



© Mitchell Funk/Image Bank

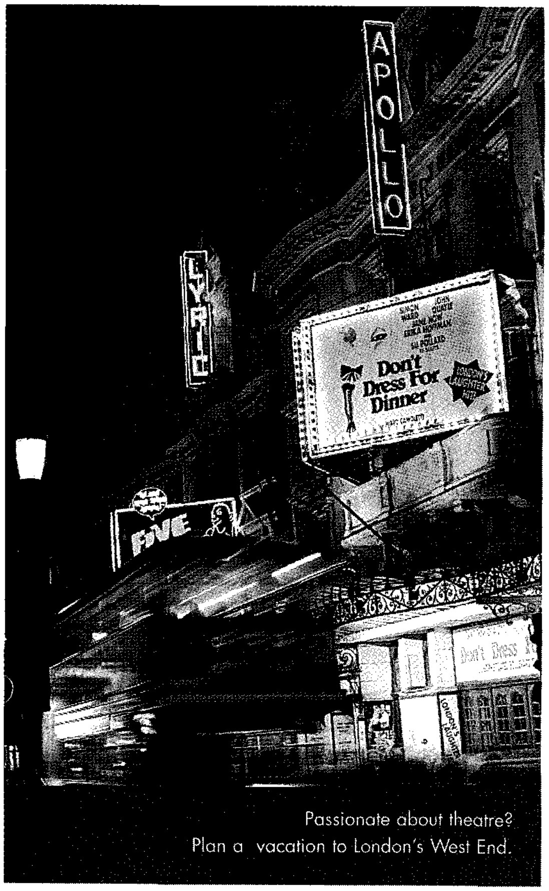
Countdown to the Millennium: Big Ben and Parliament in a streak of time.

ingredients—acorn-fed black pig charcuterie with tomato and pear chutney; calves' kidneys with persillade and beetroot jus; Dover sole with sea urchin butter. The ceiling slats turn, and change from white to midnight blue, but who notices with St. Paul's dazzling you from across the water? *Oxotower Wharf, Barge House Street, South Bank SE1 9PH; Telephone: 011 44 207 803 3888. AE, MC, V. Tube: Waterloo.*

Pharmacy. London's latest scene-arena, the Pharmacy is one of those see-and-be-seen places where the bar area is larger than the restaurant. It seats 180 and is shaped like a gigantic aspirin. Yes, this spot looks just like its namesake. The waitstaff is garbed like hospital orderlies, and even the menu looks fab. The menu highlights "comfort food" and ranges from fisherman's pie and scrambled eggs with black truffles to spit-roast Landes duck, sauce XXX (sweet and sour). If you can't snag a table, just have fun at the bar and order the "Cough Syrup." *150 Notting Hill Gate, W11; Telephone: 011 44 207 221 2442. AE, DC, MC, V. Tube: Notting Hill Gate.*

TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM

Queen Elizabeth hasn't invited you for tea? No matter. Staying at one of London's exclusive hotels is the next best thing, some say better, to being a guest at the palace. Royally resplendent décor abounds, and armies of staff attendants are stuck in the pampering mode—the Windsors should have it so good.



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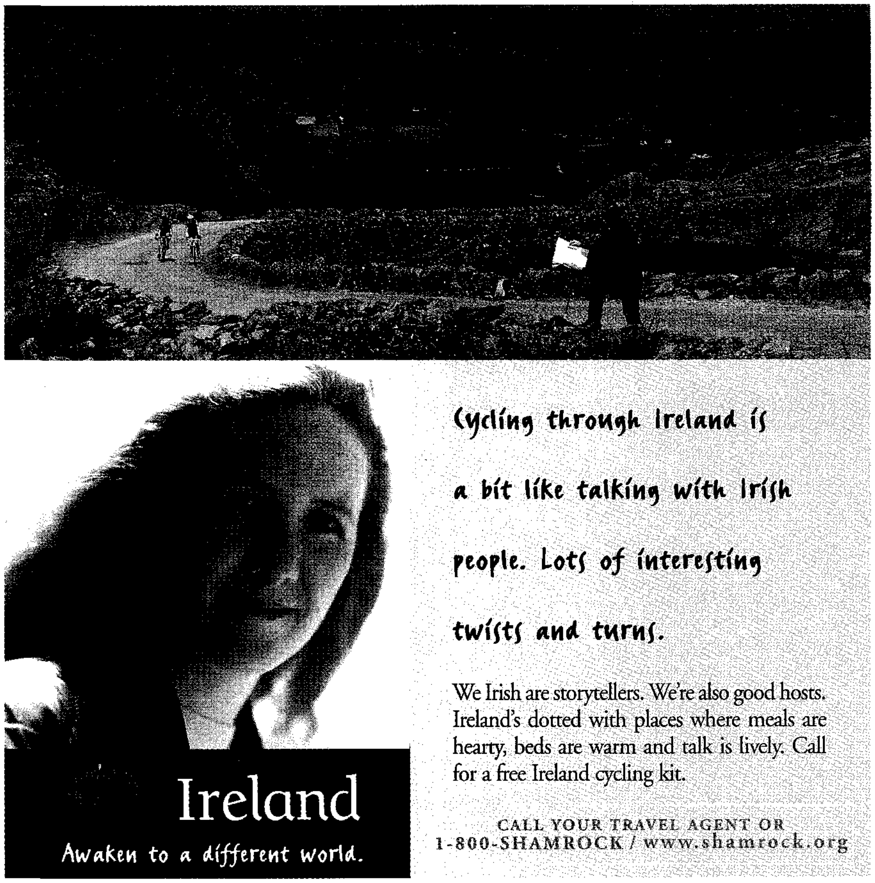
Passionate about theatre?
Plan a vacation to London's West End.

Beaufort. You can practically hear the jingle of Harrods' cash register from a room at the Beaufort, which employs an all-woman team to run the hotel. Actually, "hotel" is a misnomer for this elegant pair of Victorian houses. There's a sitting room instead of reception; guests have a front door key, the run of the drinks cabinet, and even their own phone number. The high-ceilinged, generously proportioned rooms are decorated in muted, sophisticated shades to suit the atmosphere—but don't worry, you're encouraged by the incredibly sweet staff to feel at home. Rates include unlimited drinks, breakfast, and membership at a local health club. *33 Beaufort Gardens, SW3 1PP; Telephone: 011 44 207 584 5252, Fax: 011 44 207 589 2834. Twenty-eight rooms. AE, DC, MC, V. Tube: Knightsbridge.*

Covent Garden Hotel. Relentlessly chic, theatrically baronial, this is Tim and Kit Kemp's latest extravaganza in the midst of the artsy Covent Garden district. Now it has become the London refuge for a mélange of off-duty celebrities, actors, and style mavens. Wallowing in painted silks, style Anglais ottomans, and nineteenth-century Romantic oils, it is the perfect place for a Hollywood star to be interviewed over a glass of sherry. Guest rooms are *World-of-Interiors* stylish, each showcasing matching-but-mixed couture fabrics to stunning effect. Antique-style desks are vast and modern bathrooms even feature heated mirrors (steam doesn't stick). Off the lobby, have a nibble in the Brasserie, and you'll agree: For taste,. in every sense of the word, Covent Garden is the top. *8 Monmouth Street, WC2H 9HB; Telephone: 011 44 207 806 1000, Fax: 011 44 207 806 1100.*

Halcyon. Discretion, decadent décor, and disco divas (everyone from RuPaul to Snoop Doggy-Dogg) make this expensive, enormous, wedding-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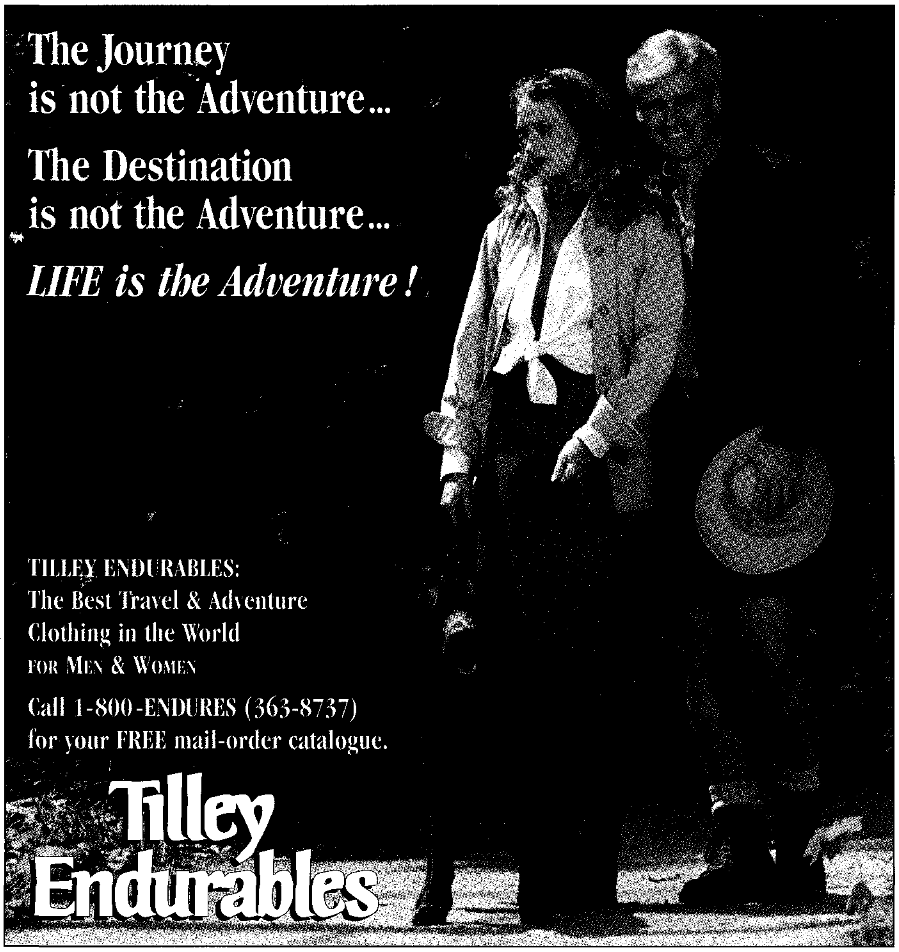
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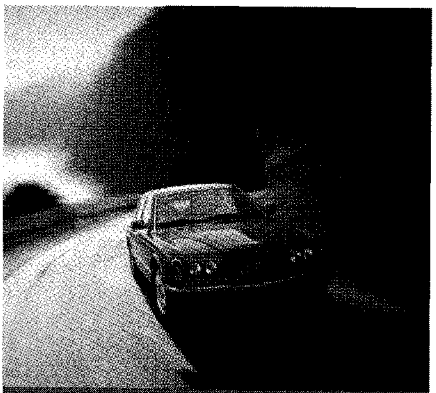


The Bentley Armage.

A MOTORING LEGEND

Bentley has a history richly steeped in tradition, dating back to 1919 when W.O. Bentley tested his first engine after nine months in development. Last year, Bentley launched its new *Arnage* 4 1/2-liter, four-door sedan that utilizes the latest state of the art technology in engine capability and performance. Powered by a new all-aluminum alloy V8 engine developed by Bentley and BMW, the new engine is the first uniquely developed for the Bentley marque in nearly sixty years.

Says Bentley chief executive Tony Gott: "Our investment and the dedication of the extended Bentley team has allowed us to introduce an exciting and entirely new four-door motor car to the Bentley line. The *Arnage* has exceptional all-round ability, and delivers a truly exhilarating driving experience."

A new Bentley for the new millennium a truly elegant beginning. For more information, visit **www.rolls-royceandbentley.co.uk.**

cake Edwardian on Holland Park Avenue desperately desirable. You want film stars? How about Johnny Depp, William Hurt, and Julia Roberts? And there are usually local residents like Sting, John Cleese, and "Absolutely Fabulous's" Joanna Lumley haunting the absolutely excellent restaurant. The hotel's gorgeous Blue Room has moons and stars, the Egyptian Suite is canopied like a bedouin tent, and the Halcyon Suite has its own conservatory. All rooms are very large, with big windows typical of grand houses. And it's only steps from London's most exquisite park and a ten-minute tube ride to the West End. *81 Holland Park, W11 3RZ; Telephone: 011 44 207 727 7288, Fax: 011 207 229 8516.*

Street in Notting Hill,
home of Europe's biggest street carnival.

© Michael Pasazior/Image Bank

IT'S ALL ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS

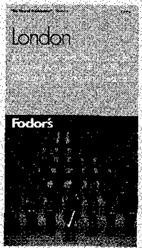
Napoleon must have known what he was talking about when he called Britain a nation of shopkeepers. The finest emporiums can still be found in London. Whether you're out for fun or for fashion, London can be the most fertile of hunting grounds.The **Gallery of Antique Costume and Textiles** attracts numerous moviemakers who come here to get period clothing and artifacts, because everything on the premises, from bedspreads to bloomers, was stitched before 1930—except for a wonderful range of copy-cat brocade vests. Models and Hollywood actors find incredible (and expensive) clothes here, too. *2 Church Street, NW8; Telephone: 011 44 207 723 9981.*

Bustling Portobello Market overflows with silver, porcelain, and ephemera.

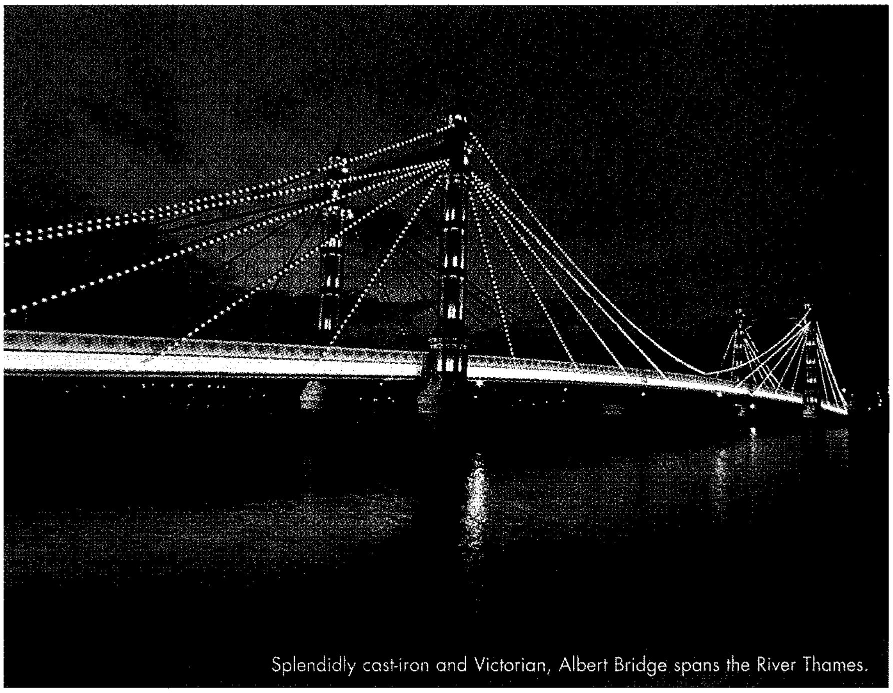
© Guido Alberto Rossi/Image Bank

Jimmy Choo is the name on every supermodel's and fashion editor's lips. His exquisite, elegant designs are fantasy itself and he's become a contender for Manolo Blahnik's crown. Obviously, these designs are dear—nothing under a hundred pounds—but the workmanship is out of this world.

NEW LOOK FOR FODOR'S GOLD



"Fodor's Gold Guides" are entering the new era with a new look and full-color, trip-planning sections in its best-selling guides, so travelers can begin to experience their destinations even before they get there. Also look for a handy, foldout Rand McNally map in all annual guides.



Splendidly cast-iron and Victorian, Albert Bridge spans the River Thames.

© Matthew Weinreb/Image Bank

20 Motcomb Street, SW1; Telephone: 011 44 207 7235 6008.

Selina Blow/Lulu Guinness/Camilla Ridley is a group of designers whose different products are among the more chic looks in town. Guinness's prettiest bags and beaded party purses spelled death for hundreds of industrial black nylon bags. Finely tailored jackets are by Blow, while Ridley sets them off to perfection with elegant velvet and flimsy, floaty scarves. *42 Elizabeth Street, SW1 W9NZ; Telephone: 011 44 207 730 2449.*

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Fodor's has launched "Planning Center" at www.fodors.com/planningcenter, where you'll find links to some of our favorite Web sites worldwide. With more than fifty destinations to choose from (so far), you can use the planning center to help customize your travel plans right down to restaurants and concerts. Just click on the city or country of your choice, pick the desired categories, and Fodor's on-line service does the rest—whether you're seeking historical sites, cultural events, current news stories, exchange rates, or ATM locations. You'll also find a direct link to the premiere on-line booking agency Preview Travel to help with airfares and transportation arrangements.

To celebrate its launch, Fodor's and Preview Travel are giving away an eleven-day Mediterranean cruise vacation that will visit the ports of Athens, Santorini, Rhodes, Kusadasi, and Istanbul, including two nights in luxury accommodations in both Athens and Istanbul. To become eligible for this prize, enter the contest located at **www.fodors.com/planningcenter.**

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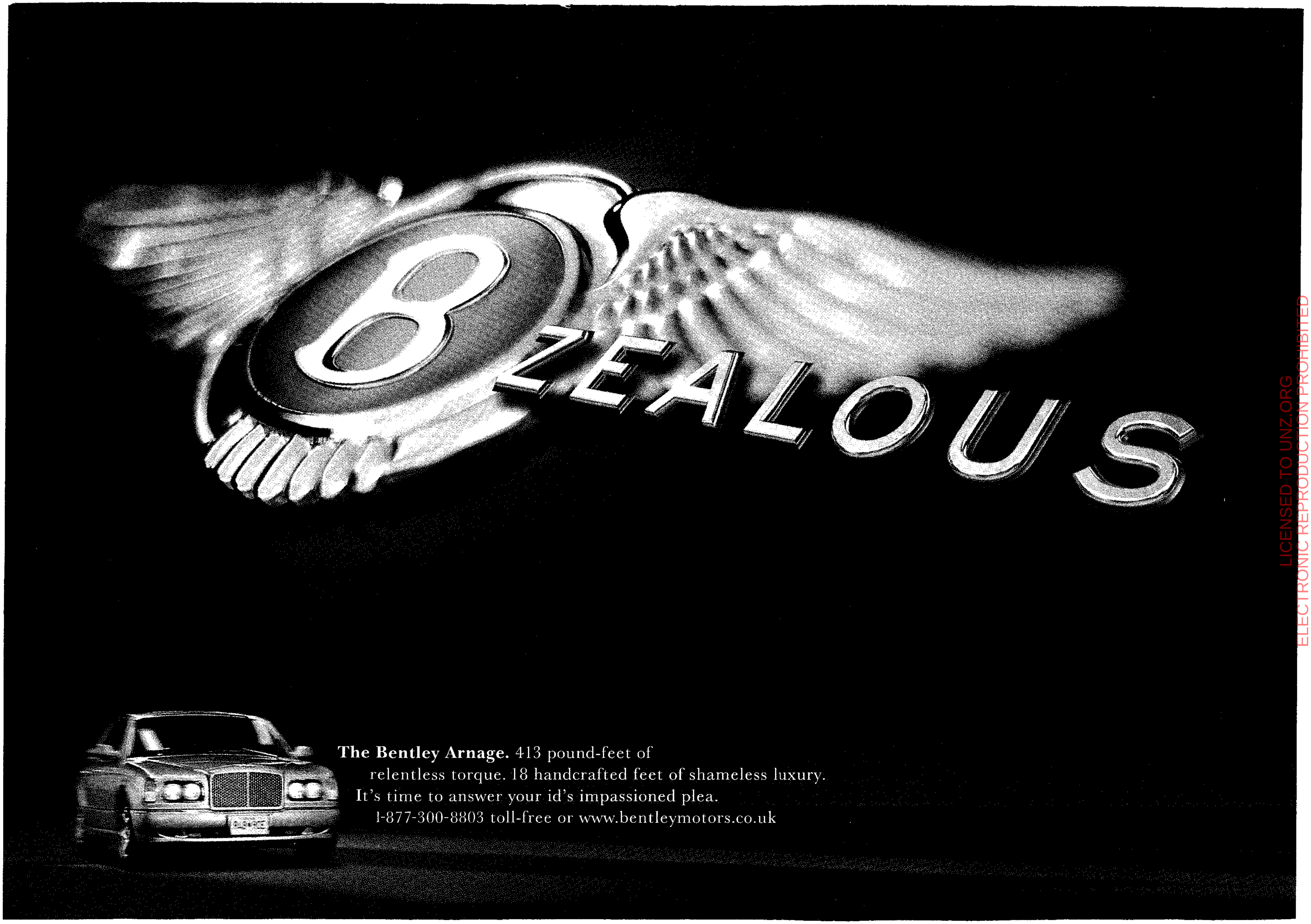

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Ebola virus. The scientist is said to be well respected by his peers, and he works with a team of analysts, mainly younger people fresh out of college. The analysts gather intelligence involving bioweapons and then try to assemble the big picture, fitting the data together with what they already know about bioweapons. After the New York diagnosis was changed to West Nile, on September 27th, the top officers in the bioweapons-analysis section suffered a lurch of uneasy recognition: they recalled a report that a self-described defector from Iraq had declared last April that Saddam Hussein was developing a strain of the West Nile virus as a biological weapon and was preparing to release it.

Someone in the analysis section apparently noticed that on April 6th a British tabloid, the *Daily Mail* of London, had published an excerpt from a book entitled "In the Shadow of Saddam," with a note that the account's credibility was "for the reader to judge." The author calls himself Mikhael Ramadan. That may or may not be his real name. Mikhael Ramadan is said to look a lot like Saddam Hussein. Purportedly, he served as one of Saddam's doubles, in order to help foil assassination attempts. There is a photograph, supposedly of him, on the back cover of the book, and he looks remarkably like Saddam except that he has more gray at the temples, and somehow he looks kindly. Eventually, Mikhael Ramadan managed to escape from Iraq. In his book he offers a wild-sounding account of his experiences working as Saddam's double, including such vignettes as a Kurdish rebel being lowered slowly into a vat of sulfuric acid. Mr. Ramadan also wrote, as the *Daily Mail* published it:

> In 1997, on almost the last occasion we met, Saddam summoned me to his study. Seldom had I seen him so elated. Unlocking the top right-hand drawer of his desk, he produced a bulky, leather-bound dossier and read extracts from it. . . . The dossier holds details of his ultimate weapon, developed in secret laboratories outside Iraq. . . . Free of UN inspection, the laboratories would develop the SV1417 strain of the West Nile virus—capable of destroying 97 pc [per cent] of all life in an urban environment. . . . He said SV1417 was to be "operationally tested" on a Third World population centre.... The target had been selected, Saddam said, "but that is not for your innocent ears."

It sounded crazy. But why would a man presenting himself as an Iraqi defector predict that Saddam would unleash a virus just months before the same one broke out unexpectedly in New York? And, of all the thousands of viruses in the world, why West Nile? It was enough to make any bioweapons analyst at the C.I.A. feel uneasy. Adding another twist to the story, it turns out that in 1985 the Centers for Disease Control had sent samples of West Nile virus to a researcher in Iraq, which occasioned a controversy in the media five years later, on the eve of the Gulf War, when reports came out that Iraq had a biowarfare program. But the fatality rate for West Nile is not remotely near ninety-seven per cent, and "SV1417" is not a standard designation for any known strain of West Nile virus. It may be a code designation for some strain that Saddam's bioweaponeers might conceivably be working on, perhaps in a French-built virology facility near Baghdad that has been closed to inspectors from the United Nations for two years, ever since Saddam threw out all the U.N. inspectors. In the early nineteen-eighties, a French vaccine company, Institut Merieux, which is a division of the pharmaceutical giant Rhône-Poulenc, built a facility called the Foot and Mouth Vaccine Plant at a site now known as Al Manal. Institut Merieux helped the Iraqis operate Al Manal for a time, and trained the staff before departing. Al Manal was subsequently used for research into virus weapons. During the Gulf War, Al Manal and the Merieux equipment were used for making twenty thousand litres of botulinum toxin, or BTX—one of the most lethal biotoxins known. In 1992, the United Nations tore down the buildings in which the BTX was made and destroyed that equipment, but it left standing eighty per cent of the facility, part of which was for virus research. (Some inspectors wanted the whole thing torn down.) Al Manal may be back in business developing virus weapons.

At the same time that the report about West Nile virus was being discussed in the C.I.A., Dr. Ken Alibek, the former deputy chief of research for Biopreparat, the Soviet Union's main biowarfare program—he defected to the United States in 1992—spoke to various people on Capitol Hill, voicing his concern that the West Nile outbreak was suspicious. "I told them, 'It will not be possible to say whether or not it is terrorism unless we have a thorough study,'" he explained to me. "We need to take these situations with a high degree of seriousness."

Mikhael Ramadan is now apparently in hiding somewhere in Canada or the United States. At any rate, the C.I.A. people had an interest in finding him. Presumably, they would want to ask him more questions about the West Nile virus and whatever Saddam might have told him about any plans Iraq might have had for it and New York City. I don't know whether they succeeded in finding him.

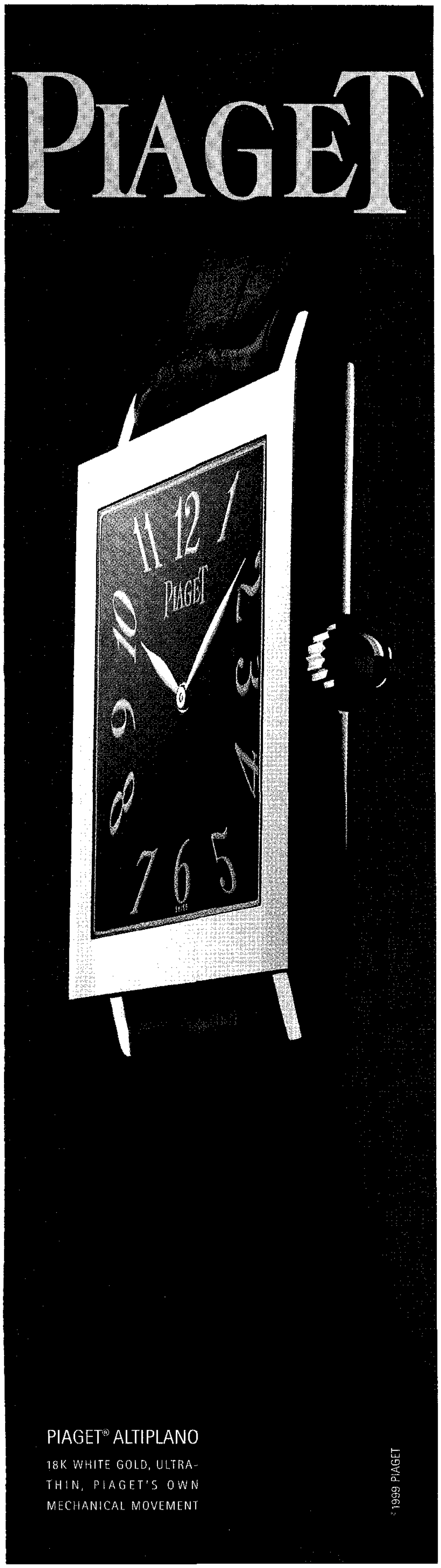
Hoping to speak with Mikhael Ramadan myself, I called his publisher, a tiny outfit called GreeNZone Publishing, which has an office in the south of England. One of the firm's three directors, James Bartholomew, answered the telephone. "We don't know Mikhael Ramadan's whereabouts," he said. "We believe he was in Canada for a while. We have five employees here, and none of our people has ever met him. We were introduced to him through a third party. There was a woman, an American-Iraqi nurse, involved in bringing him forward. There was a verification meeting with him that took place in the fall of last year, in Canada, I guess. All of our communication with him has been by E-mail. His E-mail address is now defunct. His manuscript was physically delivered to us by a courier outfit. We tried to get him to change his mind and come forward for television interviews. We had inquiries from NBC and CBS. What is that show, '60 Minutes'?—they were trying to find him. The book has sold well for a company our size. We want to pay him, but we can't find him."

"Is the book fiction?"

"We've taken his book as true, based on the evidence we have. But we don't know how much of it is true."

"What's the evidence?"

"I can't say. It would put him in dan-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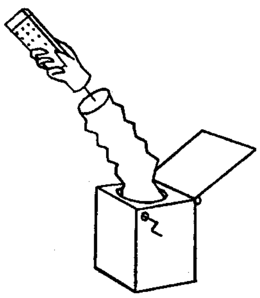
ger,” Mr. Bartholomew said. “True or not, it was a good story. We saw it as a commercial proposition. We weren’t trying to educate the world.”

I THEN spoke with the Secretary of the Navy, Richard Danzig. As early as 1993, Danzig had played a leading role in encouraging the government to plan for a possible bioterror event. He is a soft-spoken man with a thin face and spectacles, and he didn’t sound alarmed. “A point I’ve been making to emergency-planning groups is that, though we may know that a biological event has occurred, we may not know if it’s an incident of bioterrorism,” he said. “Even if you suspect biological terrorism, it’s hard to prove. It’s equally hard to disprove. This is more illuminating of my prediction that we won’t necessarily know when bioterror has occurred than it is illuminating of Saddam Hussein.”



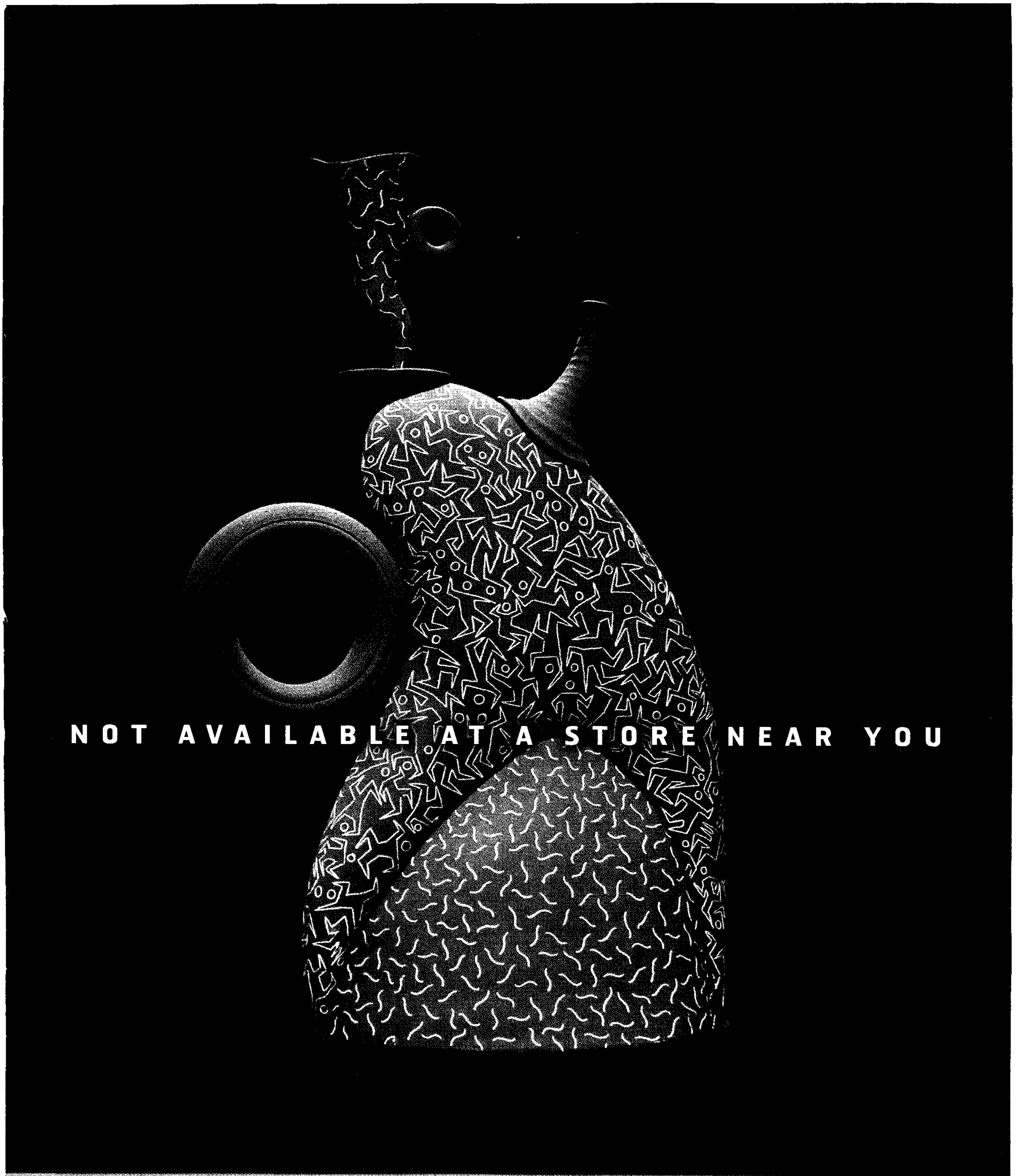
I called a top scientist who advises the F.B.I., a person who has been deeply involved with bioterror planning. The F.B.I. is currently investigating more than two hundred threats, hoaxes, and attempts at bioterrorism that have occurred in the United States in just the past year—it’s got to the point where every wanna-be terrorist is threatening to unleash a bug. This scientist seemed thoughtful, and said that West Nile might be a good one. He said, “If I was planning a bioterror event, I’d do things with subtle finesse, to make it look like a natural outbreak. That would delay the response and lock up the decision-making process.”

An Army expert on bioweapons told me that the military has known for some time that Soviet biologists working for the U.S.S.R.’s biowarfare program had evaluated the West Nile virus for use as a biological weapon. “The Russians did this kind of crap back in the seventies—they’re admitting it to us now,” he said. The Soviet scientists were interested in West Nile because it can be put into mosquitoes and the mosquitoes can be released into a city, where they will bite people. “They abandoned it because it didn’t work very well,” he said. “How many containers of West Nile-infested insects do you need to release in Queens to make it worth a shot?”

BY Friday, October 1st, the Mikhael Ramadan story had surfaced at the Centers for Disease Control, in Atlanta. Dr. Scott Lillibridge, who is the head of the C.D.C.’s Bioterrorism Preparedness and Response Program, alerted other scientists at the C.D.C. about the allegations and asked them to evaluate the evidence. I spoke with a person at the C.D.C., who said, “We’re taking it seriously. We’ll see where the data takes us. It could be done. You’d have to bring in a lot of mosquitoes.” If the mosquito-filled containers were made of plastic, they would not show up in a metal detector at Kennedy International Airport. He went on, “But West Nile is not a great biological weapon, because it doesn’t hurt most people very much.”

An expert on insect viruses named Dr. Thomas Monath, who ran the C.D.C.’s Fort Collins lab, and later worked for the Army, and is now the chief scientist at a Massachusetts biotech firm called OraVax, took a longer perspective. He thought that the appearance of West Nile in North America was one of the most exciting things that he’d ever seen in his life. “My favorite hypothesis, at the moment, is that a human accidently brought it here,” he said. He thought it was quite possible for a single infected person to have passed through Kennedy International Airport, gone into Queens, and been bitten by a house mosquito, which in turn gave it to a bird. “Unlike most of its relatives, West Nile produces a lot of virus particles in the human bloodstream,” Dr. Monath said. “Some people can develop about three thousand to ten thousand particles of the virus in every millilitre of their blood.” A millilitre is roughly a quarter of an eyedropper. The particles of West Nile look like golf balls when photographed in an electron microscope. A *Culex pipiens* mosquito could suck multitudinous golf balls of West Nile into its gut while feeding on human blood.

“West Nile already knows *Culex pipiens* well, because that mosquito



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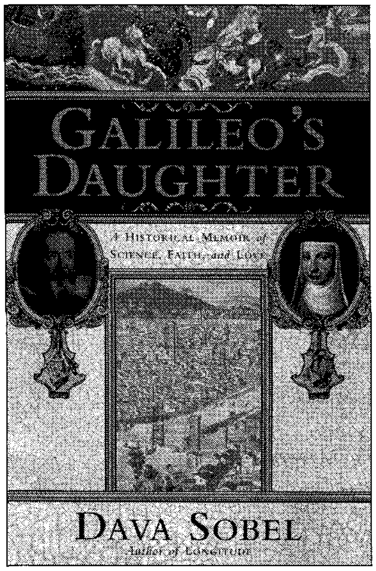

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lives all over the world," Monath said. "But now the virus is encountering a whole new ecosystem in North America. Everything else will be unfamiliar to the virus—the weather and climate, the ticks, many of the birds—so it's got a job ahead of it in order to become established. Winter is coming on. In order to maintain itself and reproduce, it's got to find a suitable ecosystem. And it's got to find a mechanism for surviving the winter. Humans are just getting in the way. They have nothing to do with its survival. In Africa, it migrates with the birds. Right now, the birds of eastern North America are heading south for Florida and the Caribbean, and they will be going as far as Brazil and Argentina. We could see an outbreak of West Nile in Buenos Aires. It could also persist locally in the New York area, in hibernating mosquitoes. The virus may not be successful at overwintering, but if it is it will take us years to understand the impact and spread of West Nile in the New World."

On Wednesday, October 7th, a man in his twenties from Lakewood, New Jersey, reportedly became the first suspected case of West Nile-like encephalitis south of New York City. Last week, he was in critical condition. New Jersey health officials reported that they had picked up fifty dead crows around New Jersey; fifteen of them have tested positive for the virus. Tracey McNamara, at the Bronx Zoo, said, "I'm certain that the number of birds being reported dead is a gross understatement." A woman in Hopewell, New Jersey, found five dead blue jays and crows, but threw them away before health officials could pick them up.

AT sunrise a couple of days ago, I went up on a ridge overlooking the Hopewell Valley, near where I live. I walked to the top of a field. Trees stood in field lines all around. Birds were chirping, and I heard the squawking of a grackle. The trees were smoky and tinged with yellow. Cloud decks were moving in, and the sun had not yet risen. A fingernail of moon shone through breaks in the running clouds, and I picked out the morning star, Venus, a pinpoint of light near the moon. The sun rose, and Venus was washed away in the head of dawn. The birds started lifting off, and all were flying from north to south, except for two crows, who loitered in an ash tree at the bottom of the field like hoods on a corner, flapping around and looking for crow-excitement.

Three flycatchers wove for insects, weaving always southward. Two more flycatchers came by, going south, and three finches passed, going south, and a lone bird with sharp wings beat by, going south, and then three grackles humped along, keeping the rising sun on their leftward wings. Milkweed in the field was dying, its leaves turning brown at the edges. I broke open a milkweed pod, and two shockingly red beetles tumbled into my fingers. They'd been feeding on the milkweed and probably laying eggs. I tore out the milkweed seeds and threw them in the air. A few parachutes of milkweed deployed, and the seeds drifted across the field. Everything alive understood what was coming. What was coming, for many organisms, was death. For them, death was not what we think of as death but a means of survival. You die on purpose, to give your genes their best chance to spread out into the world and remain alive. This valley in New Jersey reminded me in a strange way of Kitum Cave, on Mt. Elgon, in East Africa, a haunting place I'd seen some years ago. Kitum Cave is suspected of harboring a type of the Ebola virus called Marburg, which is thought to carry on its life cycle inside some unknown animal that visits the cave or lives there. The natural host of the Ebola virus has never been identified. The cave in Africa and the field in New Jersey were two habitats bursting with life, and in them were viruses, active but unseen, carrying on their life cycles. I could not see Ebola in Kitum Cave any more than I could see West Nile pouring through the Hopewell Valley. However this biological event began, it has become something important in nature. In discovering the New World, West Nile has killed a few humans and managed to roil the C.I.A., but now it has more important business—to find a way, somehow, to keep making copies of itself. If the virus continues migrating south with the birds, and if it finds a place to hide this winter, the only way we will know is if it comes back next year. ♦

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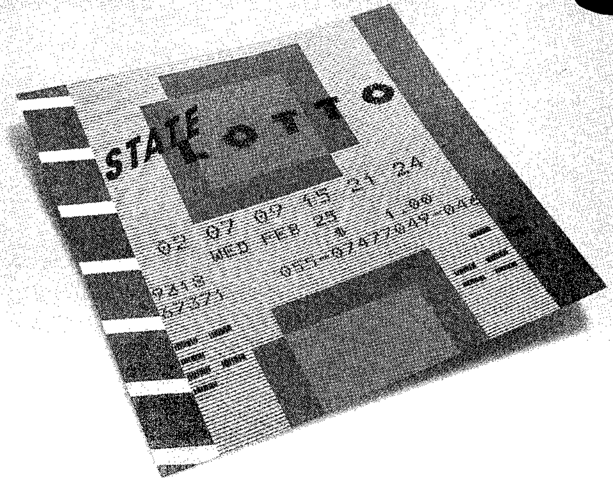

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LETTER FROM SILICON ALLEY

THE CONNECTOR

The kid who hooked up New York's wired world.

BY LARISSA MACFARQUHAR

CERTAIN people are so uncannily familiar that they seem less individuals than manifestations of a type. Jason McCabe Calacanis—twenty-eight years old, part Greek, part Irish, a native of Bay Ridge, Brooklyn—is one such person. He's the buoyant carnival barker with big ideas about vaudeville, the teen-age huckster in the trainer mustache and the cheap suit, filibustering his way into a fat cat's office with plans for a railroad. In his current incarnation, Calacanis is the founder of a miniature media empire that began, three years ago, with the *Silicon Alley Reporter*, a monthly magazine covering New York's Internet industry—which is known as Silicon Alley—and has since added a daily E-mail version, a Los Angeles version (the *Digital Coast Reporter*), and a series of conferences. He has a refined sense of the mechanics of status and display, and has not only climbed nearly to the top of Silicon Alley's social ladder but crafted many of its rungs. He knows what he wants, and he expresses it with a disarming absence of guile or doubt. "I don't see why I can't be the next Michael Eisner or Barry Diller," he says cheerfully. "Someone has to be."

Calacanis descended upon Silicon Alley in 1996 like Warhol upon a Brillo factory. Where the world saw twenty-five-year-olds in T-shirts fiddling unprofitably with monotonous graphic effects, Calacanis saw twenty-eight-year-old C.E.O.s with initial public offerings and Palm Pilots. He saw a time when New York content companies would make Silicon Valley technology look dull—"just plumbing." He saw glamour and money. But it wasn't money that drew him, or the Internet per se, so much as the scent of something big. These twenty-five-year-olds, he was convinced, were going to change the world, and he wanted to be one of them. Or, rather, he wanted to be their consigliere. He wanted to be the insider's insider: the one who knew everyone, who dropped hints and joined hands, who sensed what was happening before anyone else. He wanted to tell Silicon Alley what to make of itself, and to tell the world what to make of Silicon Alley. He wanted to be first on the bus to the future.

As one after another of the erstwhile twenty-five-year-olds takes his company public and becomes a multimillionaire, Calacanis likes to remark on the way in which Silicon Alley is taken seriously by Wall Street and ponder the small but noticeable role that he—his magazines, his conferences, the dinner parties he held and the introductions he arranged—has played in bringing it all about. He has discovered, too, to his delight, that his boat has risen with the tide, and the world is looking at him differently. What used to sound like callow cheerleading now sounds like daring realism. "Last winter, I spoke to the Harvard Business School," Calacanis recalls. "Now, I would never get admitted to that school, except maybe to work in the cafeteria—I got 1150 on my S.A.T.s. But I got to speak to the whole class here in New York, and I told them, 'I have one piece of advice for you: quit. Leave school tomorrow, take whatever money you have left that you would have spent on tuition, and start an Internet company. Because if you stay in school for the next two years—if, when everybody else is dreaming and innovating, you spend time on the bench, watching the game go by—you'll miss the greatest land grab, the greatest gold rush of all time, and you'll regret it for the rest of your life.' You should have seen the look on their faces: they were terrified. And you know why? Because they knew I was right."

Calacanis is muscular and compact, and this, along with the tight fit of his clothing and the vivid pinks of his face,

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Those who don't make the Silicon Alley 100 "probably think I'm a little full of myself," Calacanis says. "They feel spurned because I don't love them."

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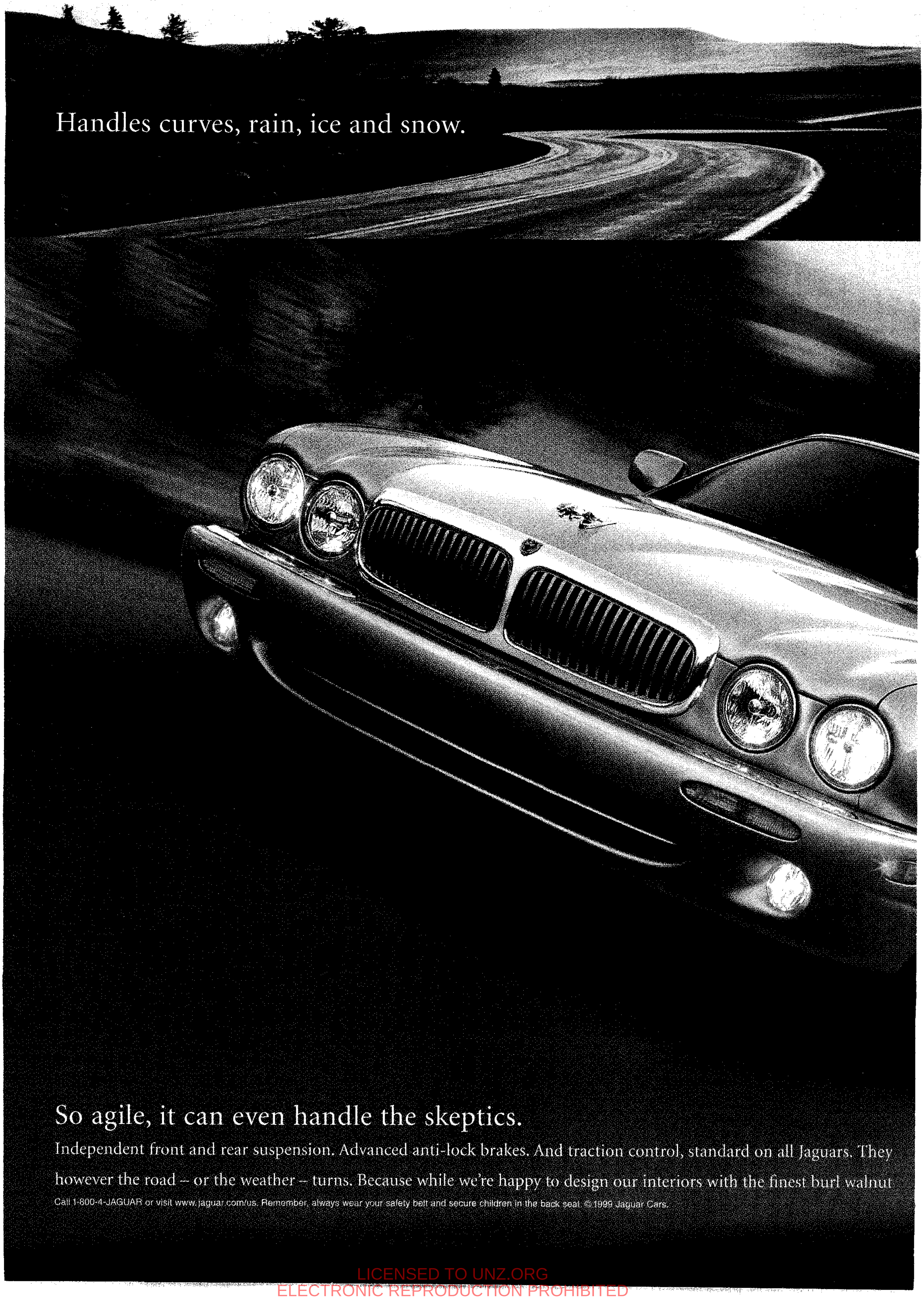

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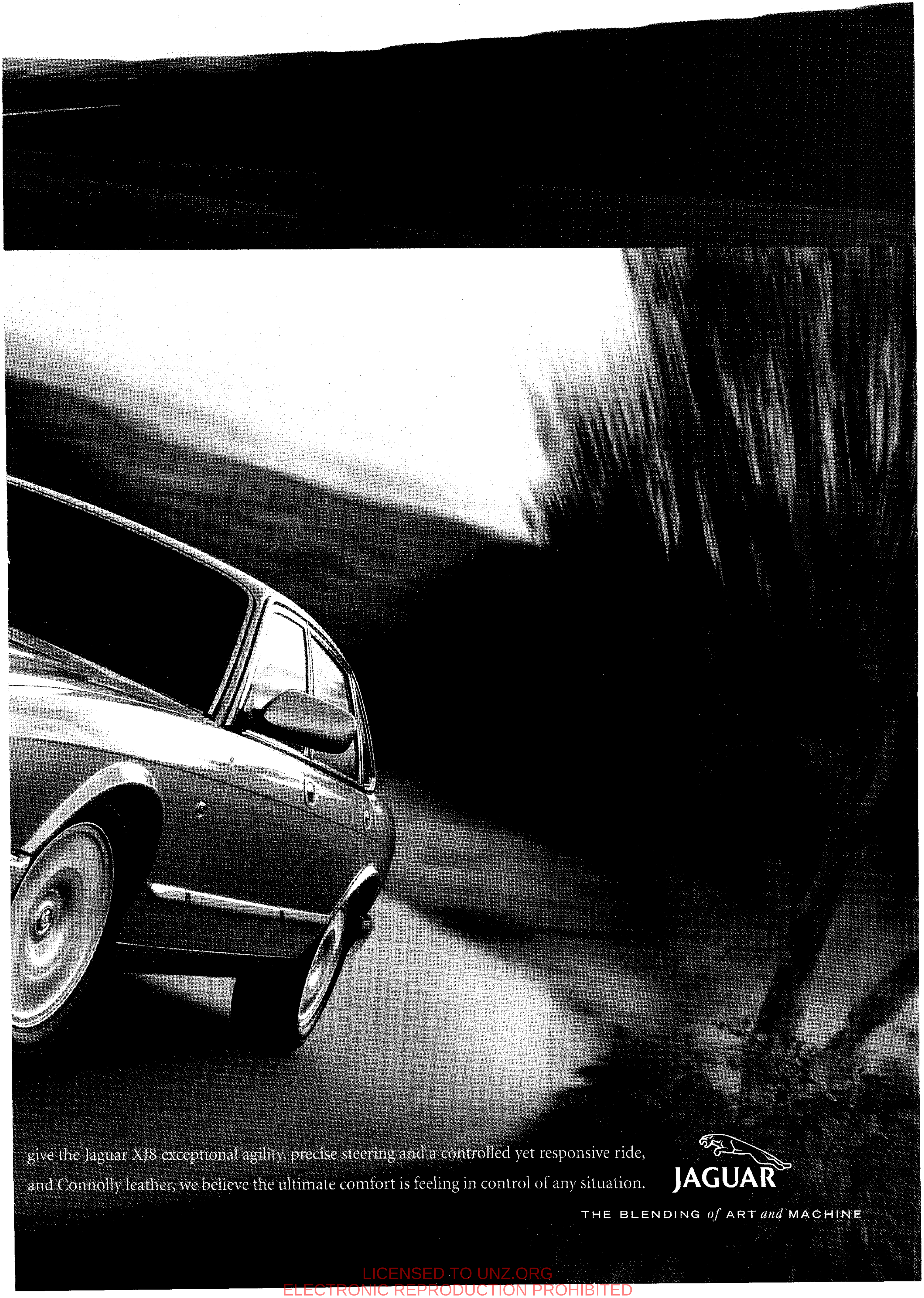
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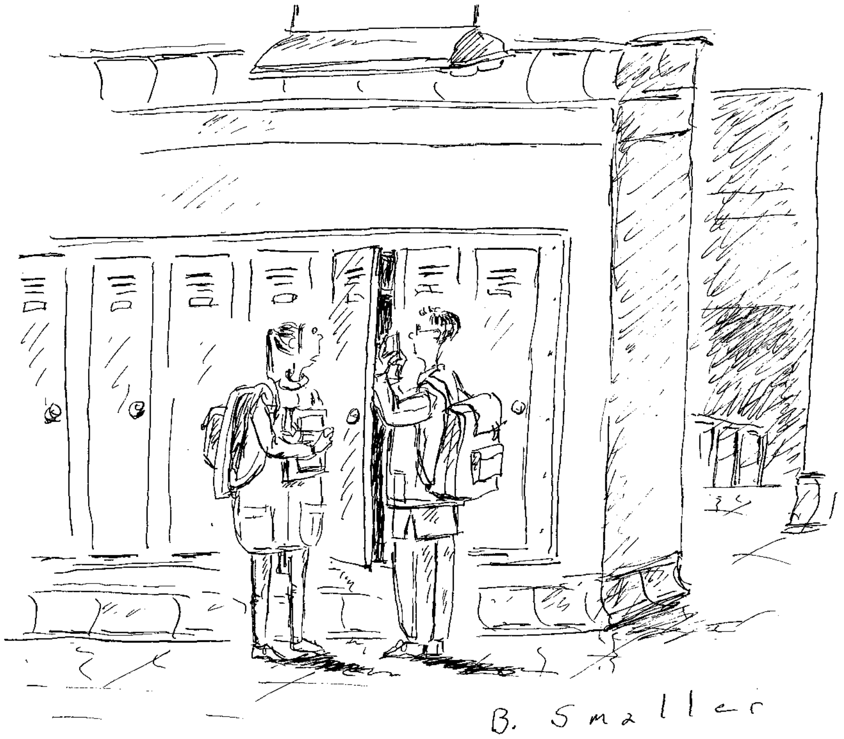
gives the impression that he has been shrunk. Perhaps because of his long training in martial arts (he is a fourth-degree black belt in Tae Kwon Do), his movements are curiously orthodox, like those of an action figure. He is not one to lounge or flail about. When he is holding forth on some recent triumph or on the future, his face shines with the manic glee of the last uncaptured child in a game of tag.

One recent morning, Calacanis had scheduled an editorial meeting for nine o'clock. At nine-forty-five, he erupted from the elevator and strode into the *Reporter's* offices, on Union Square, leading Toro, his corpulent bulldog, by a leash. Although spiritually Calacanis is committed to staying two steps ahead of the curve, in his daily activities he is invariably late. He had an interview scheduled later that day with Fernando Espuelas, the C.E.O. of StarMedia—the most prominent Spanish-and-Portuguese-language Internet media company—and he had dressed up for the occasion: tight black trousers, thin black dress shoes, a gray jacket that might have been part of a suit. Next to Calacanis's desk is Toro's cage, surrounded by the detritus of canine ennui—a shredded tennis ball, a soggy artificial bone. Behind his chair, two larger-than-human cardboard figures from "Star Wars" stand at attention: Darth Vader and an obscure galactic bounty hunter named Boba Fett. Boba Fett has only four lines in all the "Star Wars" movies, but he is the insider's "Star Wars" character.

The editorial staff of the *Silicon Alley Reporter* consists of eight people, seven of whom were present that morning. With the exception of Karol Martesko, the magazine's publisher, no one appeared to be over twenty-five; two interns—one large, one very small—looked as though they had yet to enter high school. Still, the *Reporter* had come a long way since its inauguration, in the fall of 1996, having expanded from a sixteen-page photocopy to a two-hundred-page glossy magazine. (Calacanis claims that he has had "many offers" to buy the magazine. Asked about rumors that one such offer, worth several million dollars, was made by Jann Wenner, he confirmed that he had met with Wenner, but he declined to say more. "These relationships are like dating," he says. "It's not classy to talk about the details.") Calacanis called the meeting to order. First on the agenda was the next issue's cover, which was turning out to be something of a problem. People kept backing out, and the current option was not entirely



"Actually, I'm hoping that what I'm going to be when I grow up hasn't been invented yet."

satisfactory. "She doesn't have a job," Calacanis said. "It would be kind of weird to put an unemployed person on the cover."

"Let's stick with our original mission," Martesko suggested, with an evil smile. "Let's make her a star." In its early days, the *Reporter* endeared itself to its constituency by according celebrity treatment to Silicon Alley's would-be entrepreneurs, putting them on the cover as though they were movie stars and publishing photographs of them posing at parties in a back-page feature entitled "Digital Dim Sum." But those days were over. Calacanis looked at Martesko reprovingly. "Let's get someone with a job," he said.

Next on the agenda was the magazine's annual "Silicon Alley 100" issue, which lists, in order of importance, the people who matter in the Internet business in New York. Calacanis wanted to expand last year's passport-size snapshots to more glamorous full-page portraits with a small amount of text.

"Whole body or only the head?" Steve Morris, the art director, wanted to know. It was not an idle question. Something had gone wrong with the previous cover's closeup, and Glenn Meyers, the C.E.O. of the Internet consulting company Rare Medium, had come out looking as though he had been heavily seasoned with paprika.

"They're ordering a ton of copies," Calacanis protested when he was reminded of this.

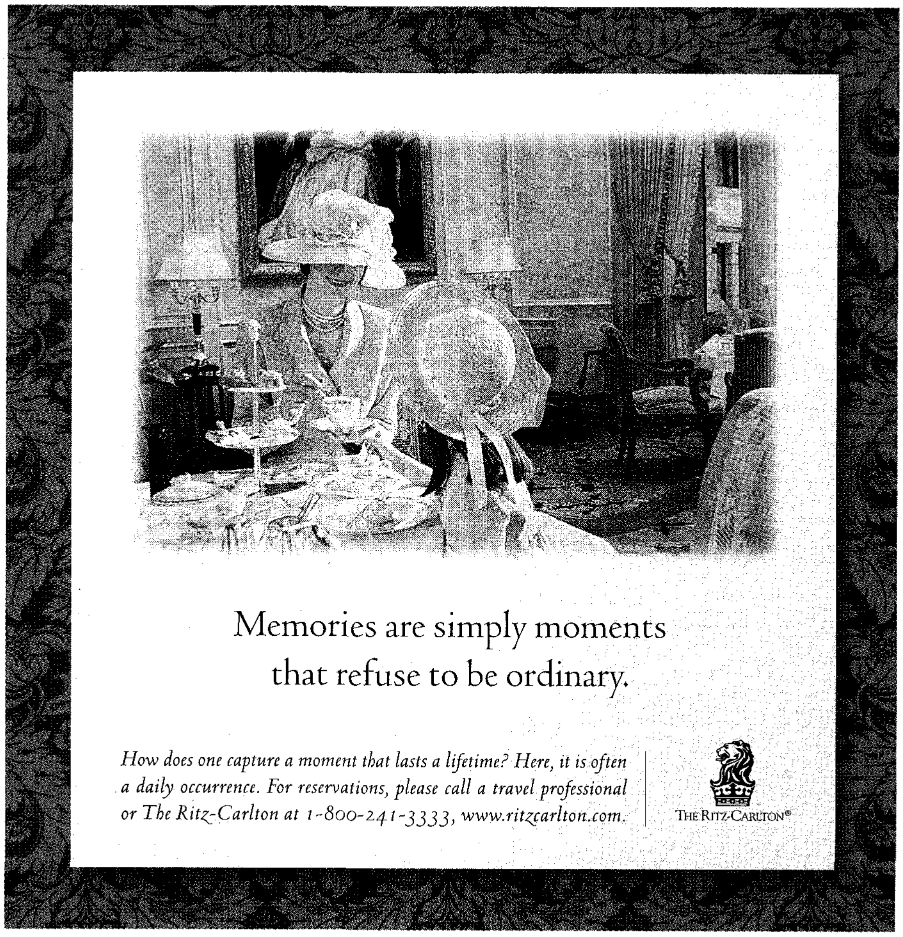
"Yeah, to get them out of circulation."

Calacanis paused to take this in. The large intern whispered to the small one that he had discovered a Web site named Doodie.com. "It's the best Web site ever," he said. "There's a new poop cartoon every day."

Next, Calacanis announced with a flourish a plan to publish a coffee-table book of the Silicon Alley crème de la crème—bringing together the top hundred from the "100" lists of the past two years. This idea was greeted with tentative giggling.

"Umm, who exactly is going to buy this book?" one of the editors inquired, after a moment, when it became clear from Calacanis's face that the idea was not a joke.

"Jeff Dachis, at Razorfish," Calaca-



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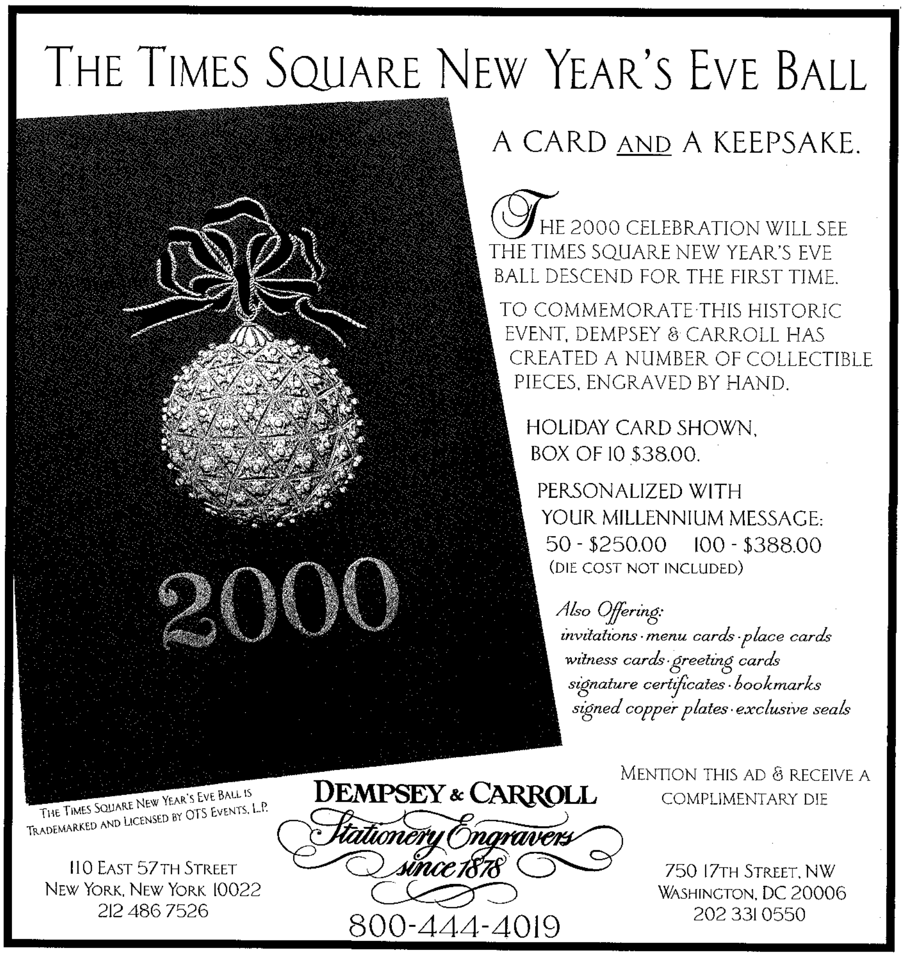

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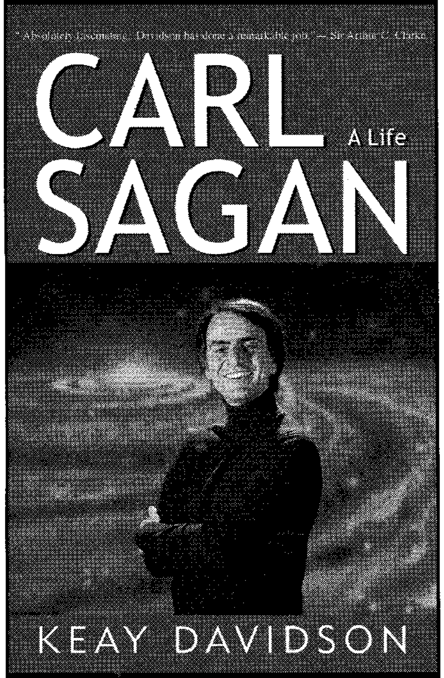
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nis said. "How many copies do you think he's going to buy? A thousand!"

More giggling, louder this time. Calacanis raised his arms in self-defense. "I'm serious! He'll buy a thousand copies and send them to his clients with a Post-it stuck on his page." But he confessed to his staff that he was anxious about the "100" group photograph. Last year, more than eighty people had assembled in his loft for the picture, but he wondered whether this year the project was feasible. "Some of those guys are billionaires now," he mused. "I don't know if they'll show up."

It is generally agreed that it was the "100" list, inaugurated late in 1997, that put Calacanis on the map. No matter what anybody thought of him and his magazine, there was something about a published ranking that carried a potency all its own. Everybody wanted to be on the list, and everybody who made it cared who ranked above and below him. Better still, those who made it tended to note that fact in their publicity material, and this had the effect of bolstering the list's (and the magazine's) reputation. There had been new-media awards ceremonies before the list came out, but they tended to focus on the doomed technology of CD-ROMS, and they rewarded artistic achievement. Calacanis's list rewarded importance, and, for the most part, that meant business. It was not just a matter of money, however. If the list had simply tabulated corporate wealth, it would have been nothing more than an accounting exercise. By measuring importance, it preserved that crucial dimension of mystery and subjectivity which made it productively controversial. "The '100' list creates tremendous resentment," one Alley figure who's made it on both times says. "Behind Jason's back, most people say nasty things about him, but to his face they are nice as nice can be, because to be on the map of New York cyberbusiness they've got to be in his '100.' "

Calacanis knows this, of course, and welcomes it as a sign of clout. "People who don't get on it probably think I'm a little full of myself, a little drunk with the power of the magazine," he says, and shrugs. "They feel spurned because I don't love them, and they think—wrongly—that if I loved them my love would make them successful. God forbid someone should look at himself in the mirror and think, I had a bad idea."

But the list served a second function, too: it signalled that on lower Broadway, where a minute ago there had been nothing, there were now a hundred new-media people worth writing about. As such, it is a key element of Calacanis's campaign to convince the world that Silicon Alley is the place in which the new-media business will come gloriously into its own. His argument, which he repeats frequently, is that now, as in the early days of any medium, it is the technology people who make the money and attract the attention, but later on only the creative types, in New York and Los Angeles, will have a hope of inventing the new genres of entertainment and advertising required to arrest the evanescent attentions of the Internet consumer. Calacanis has had limited success in promoting this view. "There are thousands of little guys in New York," Henry Blodget, an Internet analyst at Merrill Lynch, says. "And they're little for a reason, which is that content isn't big business."

In the early afternoon, Calacanis rode a taxi uptown to the Sheraton on Seventh Avenue, to drop in on a trade show sponsored by Jupiter, an Internet market-research company. He strolled past the exhibits, sampling the atmosphere. "Look how empty this place is," he said, sotto voce. "My show? Packed." He wandered over to the beverage stand, poured himself a cup of coffee, looked about in vain for milk, and shook his head genially as though docking points in a game. "My show will be classy," he pronounced. "We serve wine and mimosas at lunch, and we have sushi. It's a more mature environment."

Calacanis's conferences, like his "100" list, are masterpieces of social engineering. He creates a complex and ingenious caste system involving concentric layers of hierarchy, of dinners within parties and interviews within panels, of exclusivity both real and apparent: there are events you pay to get into, events you have to be important to get into, and events you pay to get into in order to meet those who are important, who get in free. He compensates his speak-

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Start your morning with a stroll down the Mount of Olives to the Garden of Gethsemane. Then enter the Old City of Jerusalem at the Dung Gate. Tour the Western Wall and the Southern Wall Archeological Garden. In the afternoon walk around and enjoy coffee and pastries in Jerusalem's Ben Yehuda-Nahlat Shiva neighborhoods.

Take a taxi to the Holyland model of Jerusalem, which depicts the city as it was during the time of Jesus. Continue to Yad Vashem, the museum and memorial of the Holocaust. Have lunch near the bustling and colorful Mahane Yehuda market then visit the Israel Museum's Shrine of the Book, home of the Dead Sea Scrolls and a collection of fine art, Judaica, archeology and sculpture.

After breakfast, amble along serene Ethiopia Street and go back in time inside ultra orthodox Mea Shearim. Stroll through the restored Jewish Quarter of the Old City and visit the Tower of David Museum's Dale Chihuly glass exhibit. In the afternoon, visit such sites as the Garden Tomb, the Chagall windows at Hadassah Hospital's synagogue and the Knesset. Enjoy dinner in a tranquil courtyard.

Meander through the Old City bazaars, which retain a fervor largely unchanged since the days of Solomon. Follow the Way of the Cross along the Via Dolorosa and stop off for a glass of fresh-squeezed pomegranate juice and a light lunch of Middle Eastern cuisine. Then take a tour of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. At night go pub hopping in the Russian compound.

Admire the mosques atop the Temple Mount then take a taxi to Emek Refaiim Street where you can shop in chic boutiques and sip coffee at unique cafes. In the afternoon, wander around at your leisure, then complete a magical five days with a delightful dinner, perhaps at a restaurant overlooking the floodlit Old City.

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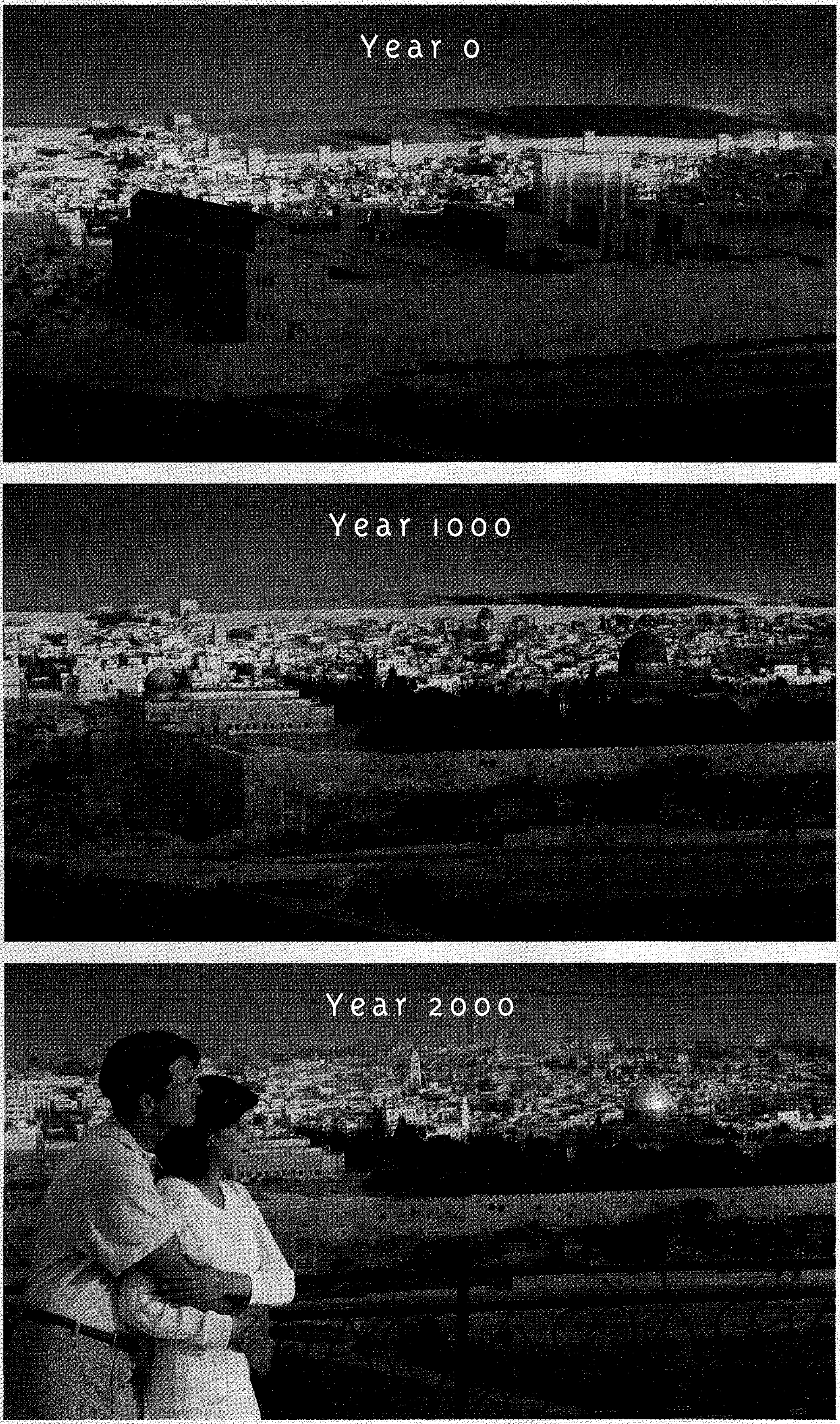

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ers with flattery (for most, he doesn't even cover expenses), knowing that few C.E.O.s can resist being presented to their colleagues as thinkers. He adds glamour by throwing in modish cultural figures—an actor from "Star Trek," a rapper, a producer of "The Blair Witch Project," the Belgian anarchist responsible for the Bill Gates pie-throwing incident. For entertainment, he invents games, such as Ready, Set, Pitch!, in which, before a live audience, would-be entrepreneurs try to talk a panel of venture capitalists and financiers into giving them seed money.

Having sized up the booths and found them wanting, Calacanis rode the escalator down to the first floor and sauntered over to chat with James Healy, of IN2.com. Healy's company had recently been acquired, and Calacanis wanted to congratulate him. (Healy had consulted him on the wisdom of the move, and Calacanis had put him in touch with a few people.) A skinny young man approached, wearing a turquoise polo shirt with his company's logo embroidered on it in yellow. "I want to go big," the young man confided to Calacanis, holding his hands apart to show he wasn't kidding around. "Really big. You've heard of convergence? Well, I want to do all media. I'd like to sit down with you sometime." A smiling young blond woman with noticeable cleavage and a badge identifying her as a representative of Excite@Home wandered over to chat and pitch. A large young man carrying a heavy bag lingered awkwardly during their conversation, then moved in to offer his card. He represented a company named @Philly, and had been very happy to learn that Calacanis was planning a trip to Philadelphia. Calacanis listened to each, cocking his ear for the punch line, nodding rapidly and shifting from foot to foot. He tries to avoid pitches, but he realizes that, as he puts it, "if I only hang out with billionaires, I'll miss the next wave."

ONE Monday morning, Calacanis showed up at Coffee Shop, on Union Square, for breakfast with a cousin. He wore a close-fitting T-shirt—black, with a white *Silicon Alley Reporter* logo—and his face was a bouquet of happy pinks. He had exciting news to relate. The last three phone calls he had received at the office on Friday evening were from a contact of his who suggested that Francis Ford Coppola might want to speak at his L.A. conference in September; from someone at Microsoft, who advised him that Steve Ballmer, the president of Microsoft, wanted to be interviewed by the *Silicon Alley Reporter* the Friday following; and from the office of the mayor of Los Angeles, which indicated that the mayor would like to write a proclamation for the conference. Calacanis related these facts with breathless exhilaration, as though he had just put down the receiver. The cousin was used to this exuberance—Calacanis visited him in New Jersey in the summers when they were children. But the cousin has followed a more conventional path, taking a job in a well-respected, elderly firm that affords him a great deal of security.

Calacanis's relationship to his background is two-sided but without conflict. On the one hand, he describes himself as a working-class guy from Brooklyn who waited tables late nights in his father's restaurant and watched wise guys beat each other up with tire irons outside on the street. He likes to tell his own up-by-the-bootstraps story: how he almost got kicked out of high school for drinking and failing his classes but was saved by the discipline of Tae Kwon Do (he has also run in the New York City Marathon for the past eleven years); how his father's second restaurant went out of business just before his freshman year of college, at Fordham, obliging him to put himself through school by repairing computers; how he used to haul the first few issues of the *Reporter* around town in a luggage cart and leave piles of them, free, in bookshops, cafés, and Silicon Alley offices. "Coming from Brooklyn," he says, "I didn't know the characteristics of the Upper East Side versus the Upper West Side, or what going to Dalton meant. It was like in the movie 'Moonstruck,' when Cher leaves Brooklyn to go to the Met: for her, it's like going to Europe." Douglas Rushkoff, the author of "Media Virus" and "Coercion," who writes a column in the *Silicon Alley Reporter* and attends Knicks games with Calacanis, tells the story of a trip he and Calacanis took to a conference in Austin last spring. "Jason

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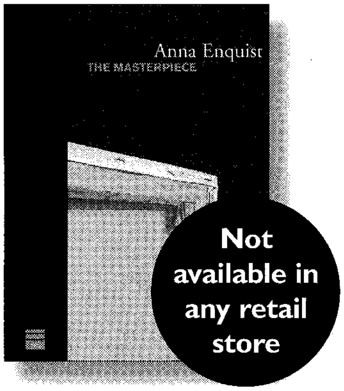

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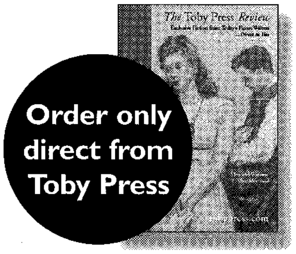

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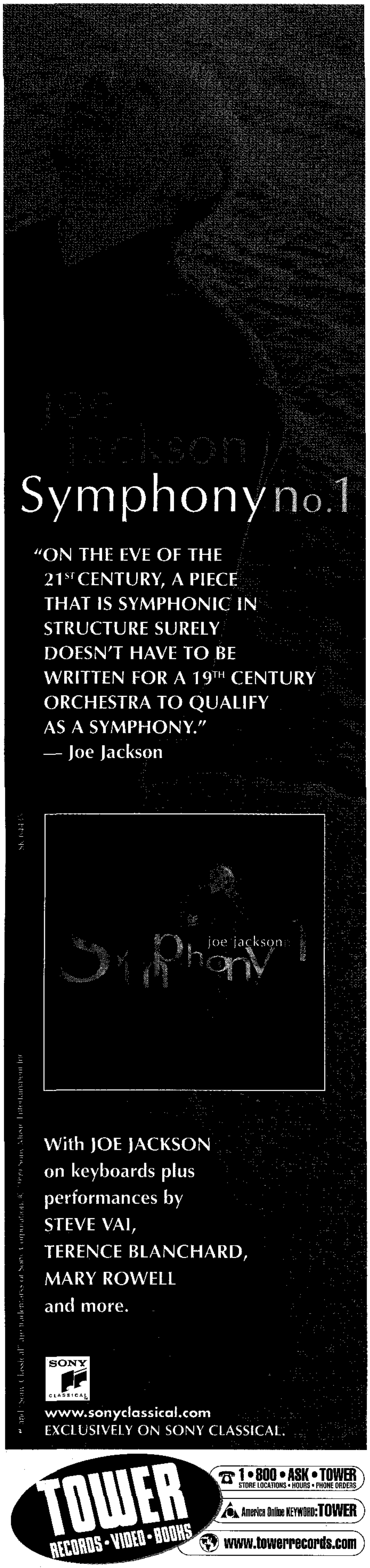

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upgraded to first class to sit with me," Rushkoff says, "and it was the first time he'd flown anything but coach. So we're sitting together, and when they came along with the nuts I said, 'Watch with these nuts, they're going to be warm,' and he said, 'No, they're not.' But then they gave him his nuts and he said, 'Wow, they are warm, they warm the nuts!' And for the next week or two he was telling people how he'd gone in first class and they'd warmed the nuts."

At the same time, Calacanis is clearly engaged in an ongoing project of self-improvement. He wears an expensive brand of cologne: Égoïste, by Chanel. He likes to order types of sushi that do not appear on the menu, in order to let the chef know that he is dealing with a serious person. He lives in a loft (he never refers to it as an apartment) in Chelsea that hews strictly to an early-nineties downtown-industrial aesthetic, which is to say that, except for a kitchen area in one corner, there is nothing in it but a half-empty clothing rack, a phlegmatic potted palm, and, in another corner, a television and two middle-aged sofas.

Calacanis's aspirations are not intellectual. His favorite author is Michael Crichton; his heroes are Bob Dylan, Lenny Bruce, and Howard Stern. "I have no fear at this point," he maintains. "In the beginning, I felt like such an outsider I just sat on the sidelines, but now when people drop some name I'll ask, 'Who's that?' And they'll say, 'You don't know who that is?' And I'll say, 'No.' And they'll tell me, 'He's a poet from the eighteenth century,' and I'll say, 'O.K., now I know.' " Those members of the cyber world who hail from more cosmopolitan backgrounds regard Calacanis either angrily, as a buffoonish nouveau ("Jason's smug and self-aggrandizing," one person raged over the phone. "He thinks he's the mayor of Silicon Alley, but he's more like the court jester"), or with a distanced curiosity. "There's something untempered and unmodulated about him," Stefanie Syman, the co-founder and executive editor of the on-line magazine *Feed*, says. "Most of us grew up with some degree of privilege, which taught us to have a complicated relationship to pitching and selling and to our desire to get what we want in the world. Jason's relationship to all that is very uncomplicated." Rushkoff often finds himself defending Calacanis against a range of charges. He says, "Of all the people that I've met in this cyberbusiness, Jason's the one who would risk his neck to rescue me if I were getting mugged. The others would call the cops on their cell phones."

EVER since Calacanis started publishing his second, L.A.-oriented magazine, the *Digital Coast Reporter*, in the spring of 1998, he has been spending a lot of time in Los Angeles, and he has found networking out there to be a very different business from networking in New York. In New York, he explains, to introduce one contact to another is to risk diminishing your credit with both, so you don't usually gather people together unless you have in mind a particular purpose with a fair chance of success. In L.A., on the other hand, a person's social worth is measured by the sheer quantity of connections he generates. There is much less of a sense, in California, that introducing an insignificant person to a famous person might cause the famous person to become irritated with you. Calacanis recently met with a Hollywood agent turned Internet venture capitalist and was charmed when the venture capitalist asked him if he knew Danny DeVito, as though he perfectly well might. "There's a frantic pollination going on out there," Calacanis says. "Someone will say, 'Oh, I was just on the phone with Francis Ford Coppola talking about you, and he's really into what you're doing and wants to meet up.' Everybody's rushing to network, and there's no thought of why we're networking. It's just, like, Hey, let's hang out."

Calacanis conducted his initial entry into the L.A. Internet world with a characteristic combination of naïve tactlessness and calculated belligerence. Two years ago, somebody gave Mayor Richard Riordan a copy of the *Silicon Alley Reporter*, and the Mayor, perceiving its value as a tool for civic boosterism, held it up in a meeting and declared that Los Angeles needed a publication just like it. Shortly afterward, Calacanis received a phone call. "The guy who ran the hip new-media

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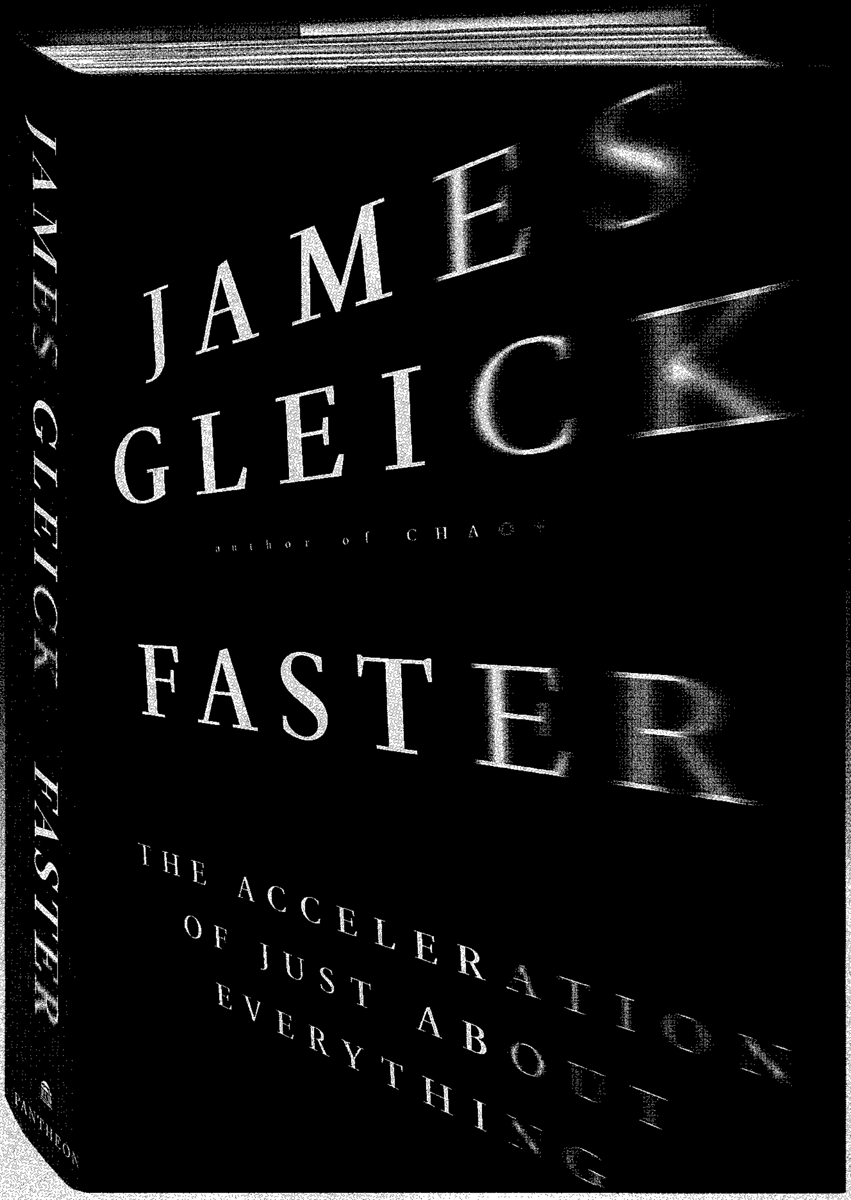
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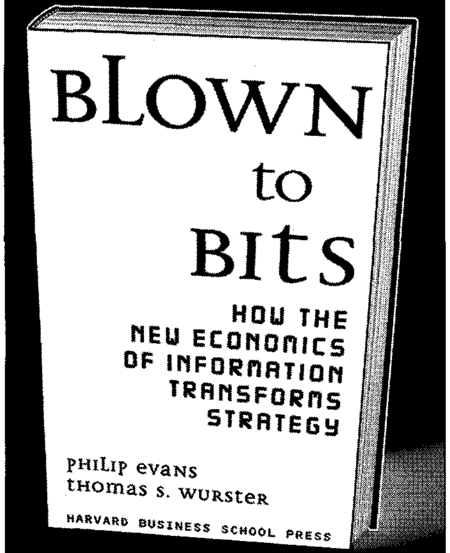
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association out there called me up and told me, 'I'll have a cocktail party for you, because I know everybody—I'll invite fifty people to this bar, Rix,'" Calacanis relates. "So I said, 'Great,' and I pulled out my two-thousand-person E-mail list from the *Daily* and sent out a one-liner saying, 'I'm going to be in L.A. and I'm having drinks at Rix.' Now, Rix is a small place: one bartender, and the bar can fit maybe twenty people from one end to the other. Conservative estimate: three hundred people showed up to see me. I was backed into a corner, everyone was trying to get face time, trying to get me to write about his company. I had a stack of cards like this at the end of the night, and I could tell by the look in his eye that the other guy was very nervous about me coming into the market. A few days later, he told me his group wanted to be partners with me, and I said, 'That's generous, but I do my own thing.' So he said, as a threat, 'You know, you could be very easily taken as an outsider. We're the home-town brand.' But I said, 'Thanks, anyway.' And now nobody knows who they are anymore. They're gone."

People keep telling Calacanis that he will end up in L.A., and the thought is not displeasing to him; in fact, he recently bought an apartment in Santa Monica. He can see himself getting into the TV or movie business someday. Producing, maybe, or writing. For a time, his E-mails carried the name Jason "Hollywood" McCabe Calacanis. He already has a toe in television, hosting a Net-TV talk show on Pseudo.com. He is beginning to think that his acclimatization to the West Coast will require a change of wardrobe as well. Clothing is a topic that Calacanis started considering seriously only a short time ago, and he approaches it as a question of packaging. He used to shop mostly at the Gap, and for his work in offices he bought himself a couple of snappy hundred-and-forty-nine-dollar double-breasted suits. Then a girlfriend told him that if he wanted to succeed in the media business he needed to start dressing better, which meant wearing black. He saw the wisdom of this advice, and has since dressed exclusively in black, with a few notable exceptions, such as an orange shirt from Agnès B. Lately, though, he has perceived that his all-black wardrobe is wrong for L.A.—that people don't wear black in L.A., and, anyhow, you can get pretty sweaty wearing black while driving a convertible—so he's considering buying a second wardrobe, which he will keep in his apartment there, consisting entirely of white.

Of all the roles that Calacanis has written for himself, the one in which he seems most confident—in which his salesman's tenor broadens to a patriarchal bass—is as host at a restaurant. No doubt, this is partly because of his years working as a waiter in his father's place in Brooklyn, but perhaps, too, in the world of Silicon Alley the distribution of a good as tangible as food has regained some sort of ritual significance. One balmy evening in the West Village, in the back room of Ithaka, a viny Greek restaurant on Barrow Street, Calacanis gathered together fifteen C.E.O.s, presidents, and other Silicon Alley figures. Among them were Kevin O'Connor, the C.E.O. of DoubleClick, an on-line advertising company that is worth more than four billion dollars; Theresa Duncan, a digital filmmaker; and Chan Suh, the C.E.O. of Agency.com, an Internet consulting company whose 1998 revenues were sixty-five million dollars. Calacanis likes to hold soirées for the Old Guard: the ones who've been around since the beginning, in 1994. Back then, most people who were involved in the Internet in New York cherished artistic aspirations of some sort—everyone had started a zine, or dabbled in video. When Kyle Shannon, now the chief creative officer of Agency.com, founded one of the first Silicon Alley industry groups, he called it the World Wide Web Artists' Consortium. These days, the Alley scene is mostly split along traditional lines—the business types, many of whom are now very rich, in one corner, and the artistic and intellectual types, who aren't, in another—and small dinners like these are one of the few circumstances in which the two still encounter one another.

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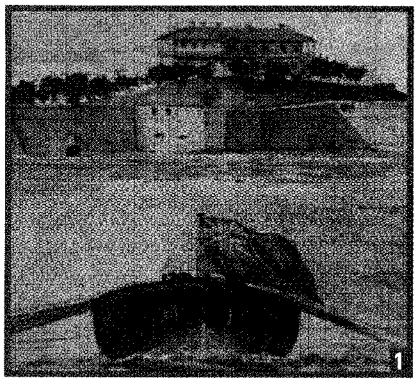

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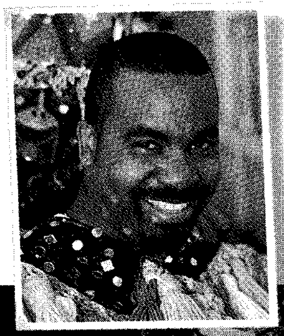

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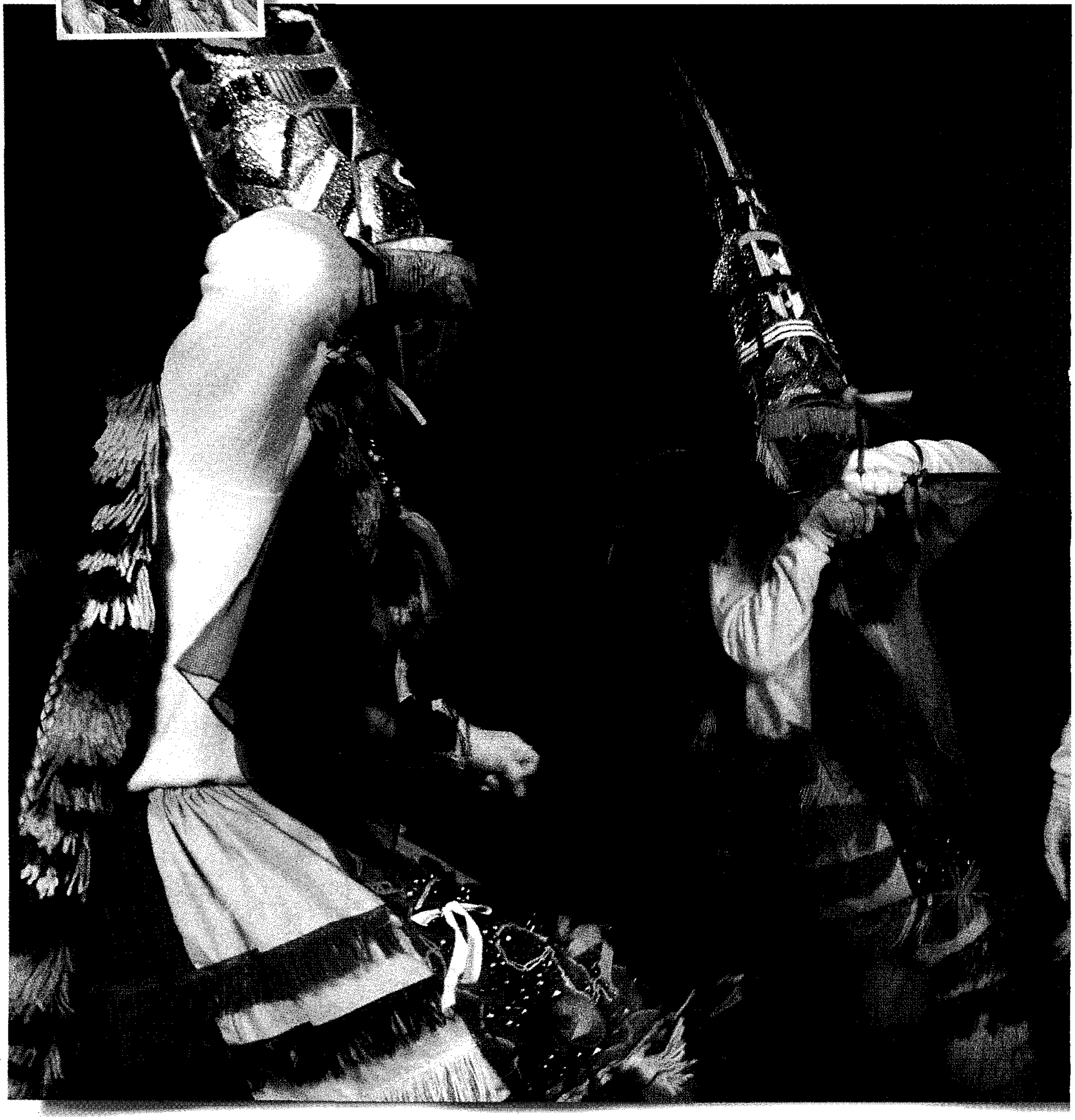

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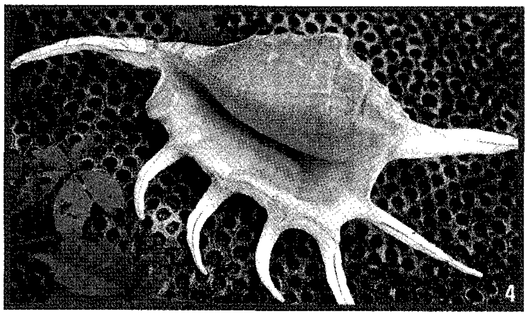

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VERDMONT HOUSE

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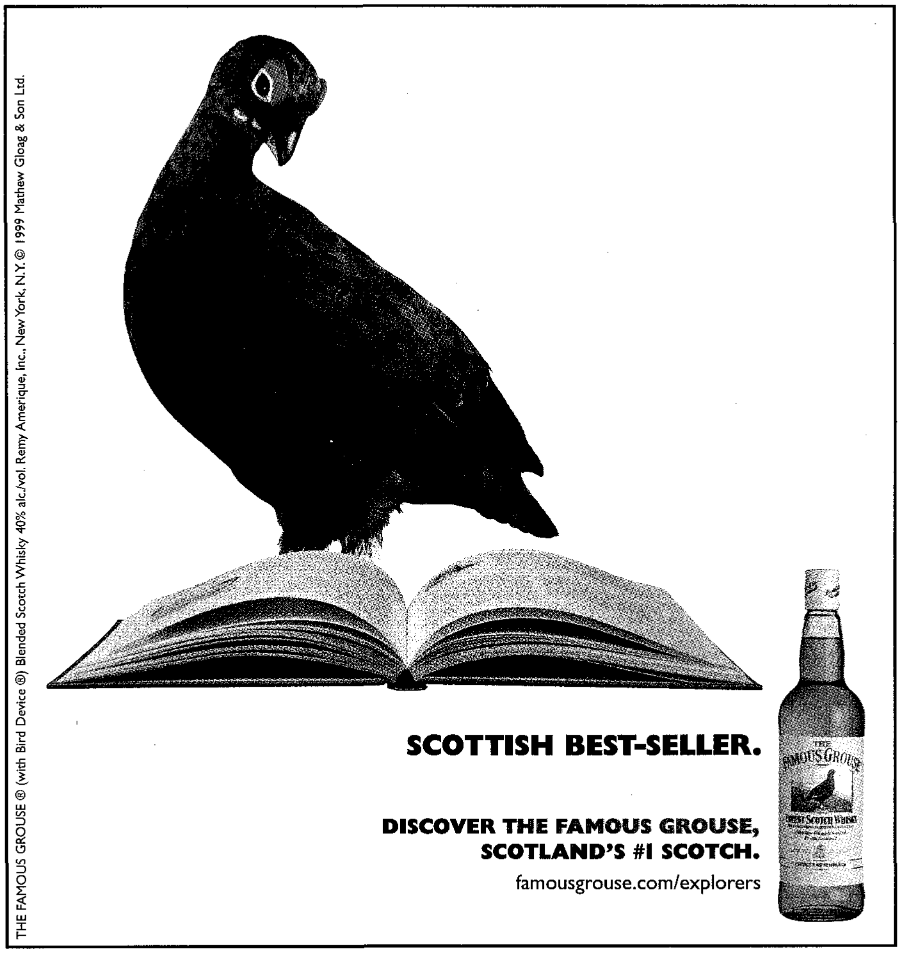
that nobody talks about," Calacanis said, "which is that some of us can look across this table and think, We both started in the same place, we knew each other when, and now you're worth a hundred million and I'm worth nothing." Back then, Silicon Alley was a much more sociable place than it is now: someone was always throwing a party to launch a company or promote a new product. In 1996, Pseudo.com sponsored a fête at Roseland in which dozens of naked people were lifted to the crest of a thirty-foot-high plastic bubble by a cherry picker. In those lighthearted days, Calacanis worked as a gossip writer for the magazine *Paper*, covering the new-media world in a column entitled "Cybersurfer's Sillycon Alley." He proclaimed the scene's winners and losers ("cheesy@best.com"), and became notorious for publicizing the conjoining and dissolution of new-media couples. He is, as he will hasten to assert, no longer a gossip columnist, but the bold-type sensibility lingers in his writing style, which is characterized by enthusiastic punctuation. Advertisements for the *Silicon Alley Reporter* ask, "Don't you get it?!?"

Calacanis rose to greet each guest as he arrived, and proffered introductions. Those who had appeared on the cover of his magazine he introduced as such: June '98, meet November '97. One C.E.O., apologizing for his lateness, explained that he'd been very busy recently. "You guys are like sharks," Calacanis demurred, raising his hands to show that he understood perfectly. "If you stop, you die." The C.E.O.s were dressed conventionally, in suits or sports jackets and button-down shirts. Many carried themselves with an air of eerie serenity, as though already, in their thirties, they had decided what they wanted out of life and achieved it. Only Calacanis, with eight thousand dollars in his bank account, still emitted, beneath his hostly bonhomie, an anxious, flickering energy. The movie "Analyze This" was mentioned, and Calacanis jumped in to quote a whole scene from memory. Later, in dealmaking mode, he called one of the guests over and gestured to him to lean in close. "You want to be head of Playboy.com?" he asked under his breath. "You need to speak to Christie Hefner."

The equivalent crowd in Silicon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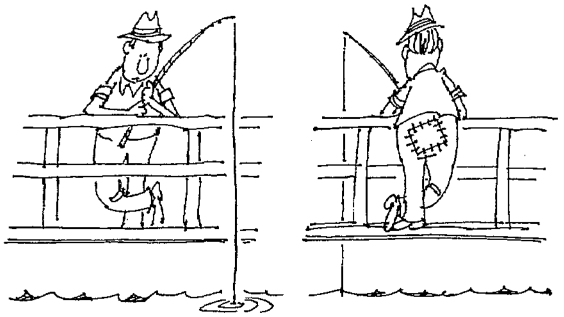
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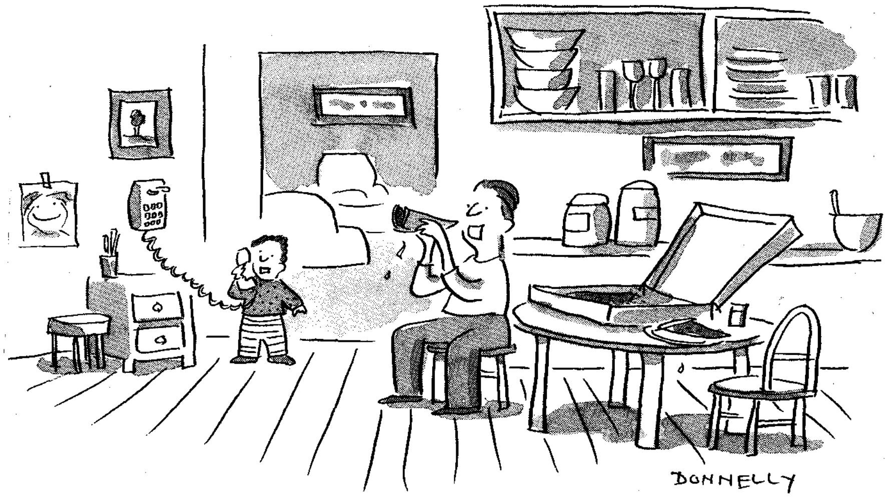

"No, I can't come and play now, Bobby. My dad's teaching me how to eat pizza."

• •

Valley, I was told, would get together at Chi-Chi's, dressed in jeans and rock-concert T-shirts. "The whole thing in the Valley is, who can be worth the most and not have his life change," Henry Blodget observes. "You know—'I've made five billion dollars but I still live in my trailer.' In New York, there's more of an I'm-creative attitude, and a hangover from the eighties which means you've got to show it. A.O.L.'s last party was so New York. There were security guards wearing wireless headsets, they got the best sushi chef in the world to fly in from Tokyo, Donald Trump was there, the place was filled with models, and I was thinking, Oh boy, this is not the A.O.L. I used to know."

At Ithaka, the C.E.O.s talked of Woodstock and Giuliani, and Calacanis took charge of the appetizers. He is a deft hand with a spoon and fork. Grape-leaf packets, fried cheese (a specialty of the house), feta, tomatoes, olives—he plucked each, one-handed, from its serving platter and placed it gently on a plate, while, with the other hand, directing plates around the table until everyone was served. Calacanis does not drink, but he knows how wine can warm up an evening, so he made sure that the glasses stayed full, and, later, when the ouzo appeared, that everyone downed a shot. For a few minutes, he sat back to observe his handiwork, chewing rapidly and forcefully, his eyes darting about the table, ear cocked for the hum of profitable conversation. He had one foot propped up on the chair next to him, the white cotton lining of his trouser pocket protruding like a mute reminder of financial reality. He took out his cell phone and quickly checked his messages.

Calacanis is the sort of person who is frequently described as a character out of a movie, but he does not belong in one of the great old films about journalism. In "Network," and "Citizen Kane," and "Sweet Smell of Success," the journalist schemes and stabs in a world in which rewards are scarce and must be ruthlessly fought over: the good are beaten down and weak, the strong go bad, and the bad are diabolical. Calacanis, by merit of having stumbled upon an underpopulated world in its infancy, has found himself in an unusual position: his own celebrity depends upon the celebrity of Silicon Alley, and thus the prosperity of those around him can only bolster his enterprise. It is a world for which he is perfectly suited, seeming, as he does, to be shielded from the more corrosive effects of envy by delight in his own victories and an unbounded ability to see glory in the future. He declares, "People always say, 'I wish I was around in the fifties so I could have been there for the revolution of TV, or the twenties for the revolution in film, or the sixties so I could have been a radical.' But this is it: you're in it. I tell people, Dare to be great. This is the time." ♦

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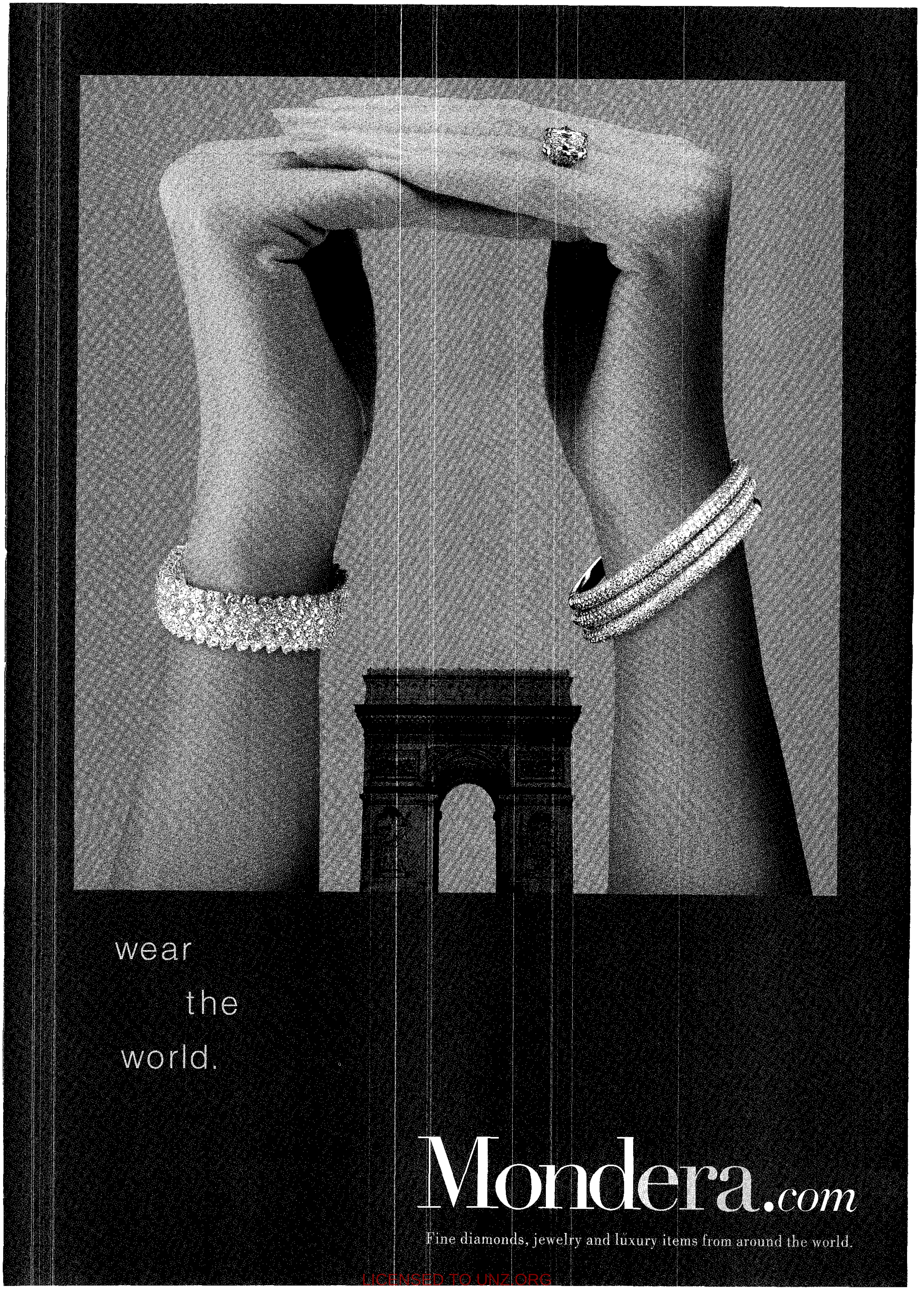
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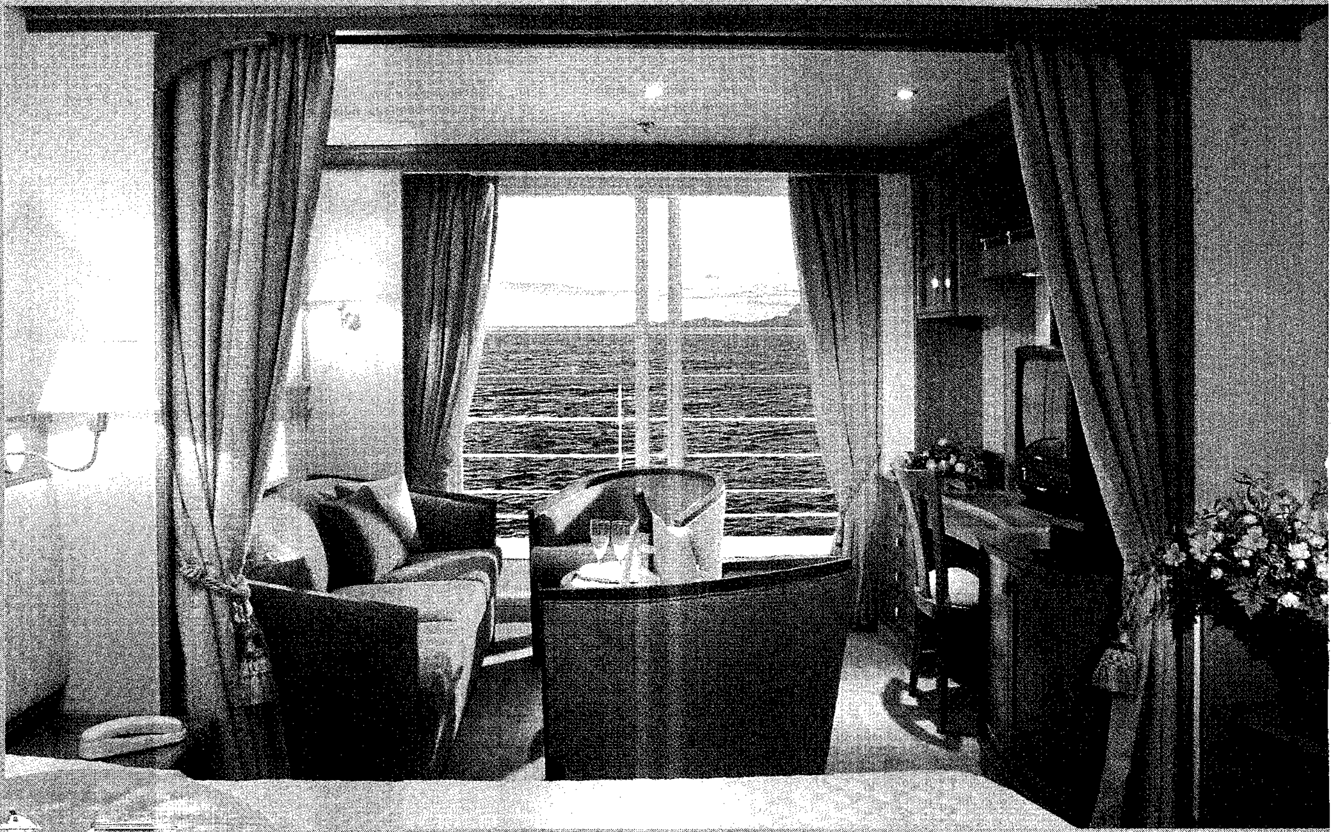

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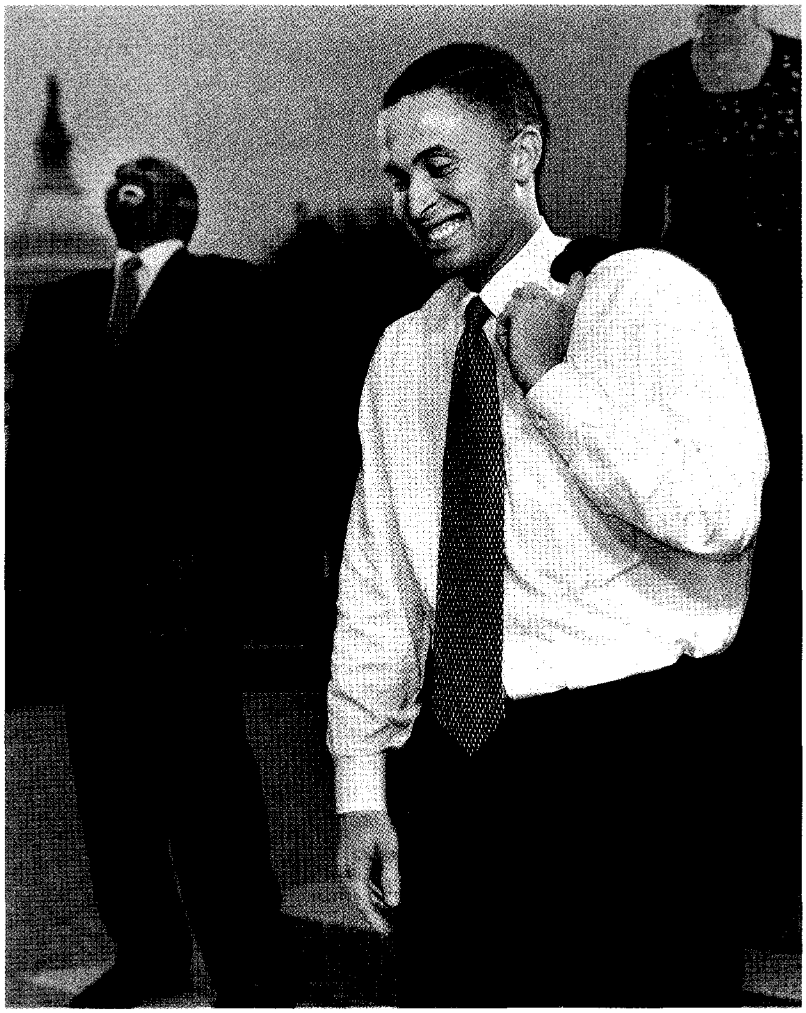

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Ford has been in politics almost as long as he has been alive; Harold Ford, Sr., held the seat his oldest son now occupies for twenty-two years. Ford, Jr., made his first campaign commercial for his father when he was four; in it he requested "lower cookie prices." His campaign buttons and banners read simply "Jr." Still, in his brief time in the House he has distanced himself from his father's legacy. Ford, Sr., the first African-American elected to Congress from Tennessee, was a free-spending Democrat who was often accused of exploiting racial antagonisms in the state. Ford, Jr., by contrast, is a self-described pragmatist, a determined centrist, and one of just two black representatives to join the Blue Dog Coalition, a group of conservative and moderate Democrats. "I'm a Democrat—I like spending money," Ford says. "But I like to be able to pay the bills. I don't think that's a black issue or a white issue. I think it's just common sense."

—ELIZABETH KOLBERT

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POSTCARD FROM CONCORD

THE CRAFT

A teen-ager with a gift for white magic and dark novels.

BY MELANIE THERNSTROM

They don't exactly look like a coven—Amelia Atwater-Rhodes and her three friends, locking arms as they walk, their voices overlapping and merging into giggles. It's a fine Friday morning in Concord, Massachusetts, whose tiny historic center—the green, the white wooden Unitarian church, a salmon-colored Colonial house on the slope of the old British graveyard—still bears a pleasing resemblance to the black-and-white reproductions of its earlier incarnations, posted around town.

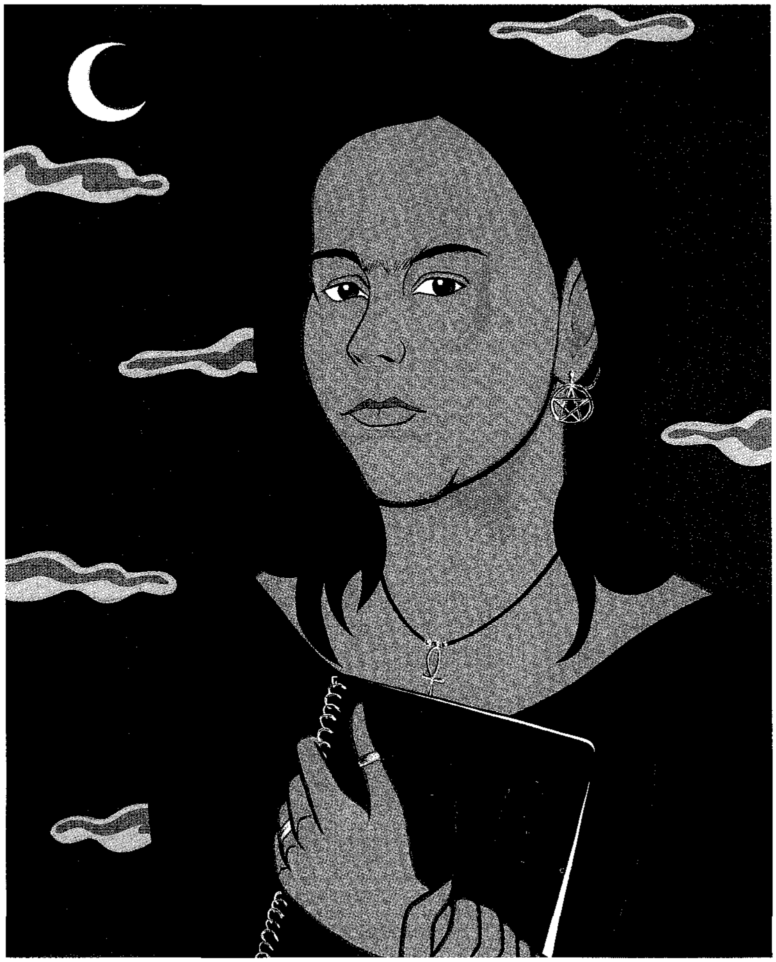
The Colonial house is also a landmark of a different kind. "That's Risika's house!" Amelia says, pointing to it. Boxes are visible through the windows; someone seems to be moving in. But when Amelia was writing her newly published novel, "In the Forests of the Night," only Risika, her three-hundred-year-old teen-age vampire-protagonist, inhabited it. From the house, Risika could see both the graveyard and the church, which she had attended when she was Rachel, a mortal eighteen-year-old who changed into a vampire in 1702. "Forests" has another teen-age Concord character—Jessaca—who writes what she believes is fiction about vampires, though most vampires regard her creativity as eavesdropping, and her novel as an exposé. In Amelia's forthcoming novel, "Demon in My View," which will appear next spring, Jessaca publishes her book, and as the vampires read about the details of their lives they begin making plans to "dice the writer into bite-size bits."

Climbing the hill to the graveyard, Amelia and her friends gab about Aubrey, Caryn, and Sarah—other shape-shifting vampires, witches, and vampire-hunters who populate one or another of Amelia's novels. It's a conversation they've been having for years—now spiked by gibes about mortal Concord Carlisle High School sophomores, who are sometimes reincarnated in Amelia's writing, complete with fangs.

Amelia is a polite, serious fifteen-year-old with an air of quiet composure. She's the acknowledged group leader and chronicler, because, as her friend Sara Keleher explains, "she's just one big ball of strong." Amelia is five feet one, with a neatly balanced body and straight, shoulder-length nutmeg hair, which in certain lights exactly matches her hazel eyes—the kind of girl who becomes prettier the longer you look at her. She's wearing a clingy black T-shirt, black jeans, a silver-and-amber ankh pendant, and no makeup. ("I don't have any hideous scars I have to cover up," she says.) She and the other girls dress dark and glittery: "witchy," one might say—sleeker than hippie, nicer than punk, sexier than Goth. At the same time, they insist that clothes are unimportant to them: they dislike the mall, don't buy designer labels, and, Amelia says, they "have *things* to discuss besides shoes."

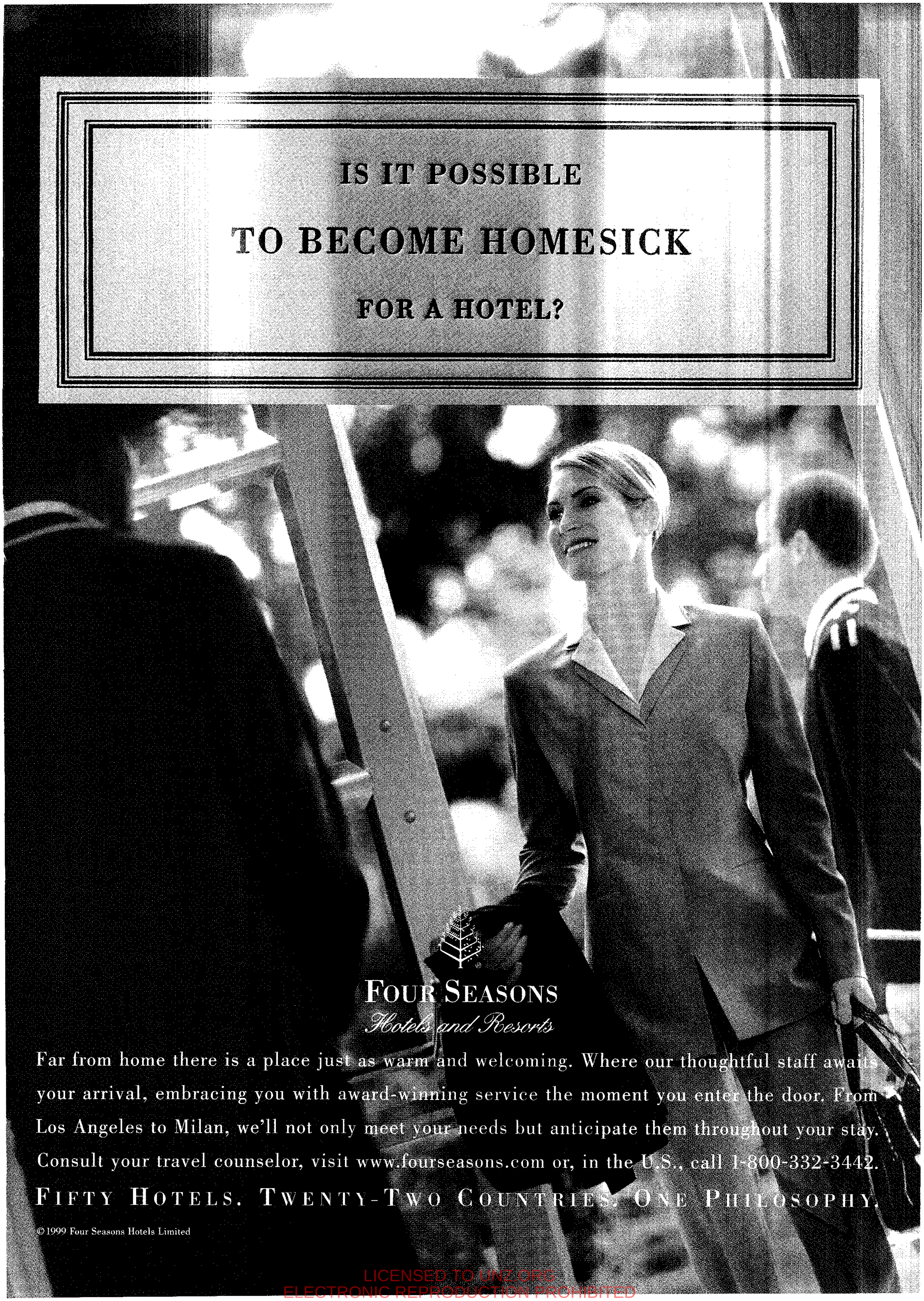
Amelia lives with her parents in a modest two-story red house, within walking distance of Walden Pond. There's an intense secret-brewing atmosphere as the girls enter their leader's lair, closing the bedroom door behind them. The small room contains a black-fringed canopy bed, a massive computer, and a magenta lava lamp. There's a shelf of books—some foreign-language dictionaries (including Spanish and Swahili), a Time-Life volume about life in ancient Egypt (the birthplace of one of Amelia's vampires), and lots of contemporary horror paperbacks. When I ask Amelia what she reads in school, she says, "You know, 'classics' "—"Raisin in the Sun," "Great Expectations," "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"—books that she finds "long" and "not really interesting" and, in fact, "all the same."

Although "Forests," which was issued by Delacorte, a division of Random House, is her first published novel, it's actually just one of twenty-four novels she has completed. (She has an additional twenty-four "in progress.") Cubbyholes in her



"Sometimes even I get freaked out by my books," Atwater-Rhodes says.

BONNIE BRYANT



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—Les Murray

room are filled with black vinyl folders containing the two dozen finished manuscripts, whose pages are illuminated with different-colored markings, where she and her friends have edited and reëdited one another's comments. The twenty-four novels in embryo are stored in her computer.

Jessica Guenther, Andrea Brodeur, and Sara Keleher fell in with one another during middle school, "when people have to form groups to defend themselves," Amelia says. "No one would come near our lunch table." During a family excursion to Salem three years ago, she came across a book on Wicca, a revival of the pre-Christian, nature-worshipping religions that caught on with New Age boomers in the seventies and has recently become popular with young women. Soon afterward, the group began calling themselves the Candle-Light Circle and celebrating the full moon and a multicultural mishmash of pagan holidays. They also perform ancient rites, cast spells, and keep a "Book of Shadows," in which they enter basic witchcraft information, such as the meanings of various herbs, as well as the minutes of their meetings.

"We prefer to be called Wiccan," Andrea tells me, her beaded braids jingling. " 'Witch' has a negative connotation in our culture."

"Not all witches are Wiccan," Sara adds. "Some are Goth." (Goth, in Amelia's opinion, is "sort of morbid, sort of boring.") Sara complains that too many people associate Wicca with Satanists, although "it's *totally* unrelated!"

"Last Halloween, we lit candles in front of the house, in a double chalk circle with Norse runes and Phoenician letters," Amelia recalls. "We did it to show the kids that witchcraft isn't bad. We tried to invite them into the circle, but most of them were terrified, and ran away and left our candy."

At her computer, Amelia prints out a seven-page character genealogy, tracing events such as when the Smoke Witch Line was crossed with a different line, which, in turn, is blood-crossed by a vampire-werewolf. It's a document of stunning complexity: creatures spawning new creatures, most of whom can both shift shapes and time-travel and are therefore apt to remeet or remate or retrospectively kill one another. It will require a dizzying number of books to straighten their histories out. Unless Amelia manages to achieve the immortality of her characters, her imagination has already extended beyond her own life span.

In Amelia's novels, no one's ever at home—just the teen-ager alone with the spirits. But at six o'clock there is noise downstairs as Amelia's mother arrives and the other parents come to fetch their daughters, all of them a year

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Susan Atwater-Rhodes, Amelia's mother, is a short, energetic woman in her early fifties, with dark curly hair, who works as a vice-principal at Acton-Boxborough High School. Amelia's father, William, emerges from his study, where, it turns out, he's been all along. He's also in his fifties, with gray-brown hair and black-rimmed glasses, and works as an econometrician doing public-policy consulting. Rachel, an older sister, has just started her freshman year at Wesleyan, but a cousin, Nathan Plummer, who is heading toward a career in musical theatre, also lives with the family. After dinner, he belts out a startlingly good rendition of "The Music of the Night" from "Phantom of the Opera," while Amelia accompanies him on the piano. The house is slightly overrun by five animals, including ferrets; it has the feel of one of those cozy domestic American novels in which a touch of magic realism has been imported. Household objects are spoken of as though they'd been endowed with a little will of their own: Esmeralda, a round-bottomed broom, can sometimes stand upright, unassisted, in the middle of the room—but not at that moment.

In the spring of 1997, Rachel's tenth-grade English teacher, Tom Hart, offered to read one of her little sister's novels. Before Hart turned to teaching, he had had a career in publishing, first as an editor at Houghton Mifflin, and then as an agent, representing small literary and sports-related nonfiction books. He wasn't familiar with horror, let alone young-adult horror, but he recognized Amelia's talent and sent the manuscript off to Delacorte. On her fourteenth birthday, Hart dropped by the house, bringing news of a contract.

By the time "Forests" was published, Amelia's second book, "Demon," had been sold, and the contract for a third one is now being finalized. The typical Y.A. novel sells between five and ten thousand copies, primarily to libraries and schools, but "Forests" is being bought by young teens as well. It has already gone through several printings, and there are currently about fifty thousand copies in print. (With her sister's help, Amelia negotiated an eighty-twenty split with her parents on the proceeds from "Forest," with the eighty per cent going to a college fund and most of the remaining twenty earmarked for animal charities. At the same time, she retained full rights to her weekly allowance.) No one in the world of young-adult publishing has managed to come up with an analogy to Amelia: other early-teen-age writers simply don't write coherent multiple-character, time-weaving, metafictional novels.

Though Susan and William are devotees of the horror genre (they describe themselves as "Anne Rice freaks") and enjoy Amelia's work, it didn't strike me that being a writer is an occupation they take especially seriously. And the fact that the craft has been professionally mastered by their adolescent doesn't seem to have changed their attitude. Susan views her daughter's writing career the way a parent might view, say, competitive horseback-riding—as a phase. "Amy's a doer, a collector, a person with a million interests," she says. "She sews, fences, is deep into the Internet, animals, ecology. I guess I would be surprised if in twenty years all she's doing is writing." The thought of a movie deal has crossed Susan's mind, she concedes, but she has dismissed it. "I want to feel O.K. if tomorrow she comes to me and says, 'Mom, I'm bored with this—I would much rather finger-paint,' " she tells me. "I want to be a mother who says, 'O.K., let's explore that,' instead of the mother who says, 'Oh no! I built my whole future on your Stephen King movie!' "

William worries that Amelia's writing will interfere with her developing the broad-ranging interests and skills—"math as well as communication"—that are necessary for a career in the contemporary world. "What I'm concerned about," he says firmly, "is that she does her homework."

AMELIA edits her own work according to a couple of basic principles. Once in a while, a line she strikes is "unnecessary," but usually it's just not "in character." Naturally, her characters find themselves in messy situations, but she claims not to "go for the gore." She burns people alive, but she doesn't "focus on it." And when it comes to "flaying someone's skin off" it's her opinion that "most people don't want to know every little single detail." When she finishes a book, she can tell whether it's good, because "it sucks you in."

Amelia has an uncanny understand-

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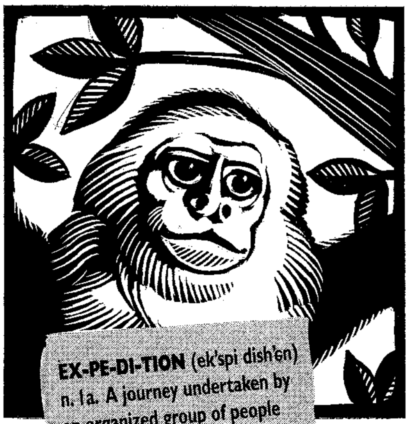

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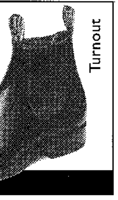

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ing of the kind of narrative that makes for a successful potboiler: she's skilled at creating characters the reader easily and instantly bonds with, and she's resourceful when it comes to putting them in jeopardy. There's lots of snappy boy-versus-girl repartee, as well as vicious physical confrontations in which the girl invariably triumphs: "She twisted the knife to make sure his heart was completely destroyed." Her heroines are isolated in their sleepy town and hellhole high school: "The residents of Ramsa seemed to shy away from Jessaca almost unconsciously. Yet despite her favorable appearance, she had never had so much as a date." But they're preoccupied anyway, with seducing and killing vampires and (in a move Buffy could only dream of) choosing whether to become vampires in order to find love.

Arresting language is not a hallmark of Amelia's novels. They don't yearn to be literary. They're suspenseful but not haunting. They take imagination to write, but not to read. On a good day—a day when she wakes up at five and works until ten at night—she can write sixty pages. She wrote the second half of "Forests" in a few days. In the best sense of the word, it shows.

"I don't outline," Amelia says. "I don't draft. I couldn't teach it. It's really something that comes to me, not something I've learned." She can't picture being a full-time writer, because "I need to get away from it," she says. "Sometimes even I get freaked out by my books." She would like to work with animals or "teach kids, help with the school musical—fun things," she says a little wistfully.

Tom Hart tells me that he thinks Amelia may take a break from writing when she goes to college, and then return to it and go on to write serious, realistic literary fiction. I ask Hart what he makes of the fact that the prodigy of Concord has never read a Concord author. He laughs weakly and says, "She will. She will look back on the books she read in class, and she will find one or two that she likes. She's just like Jo, up in her room writing, writing."

I recall, though, how earlier in the day Amelia and I had visited the Sleepy Hollow Cemetery and I had watched her stride impatiently past the graves of Alcott, Hawthorne, and Emerson. As she settled at the base of a large tombstone, I realized that for

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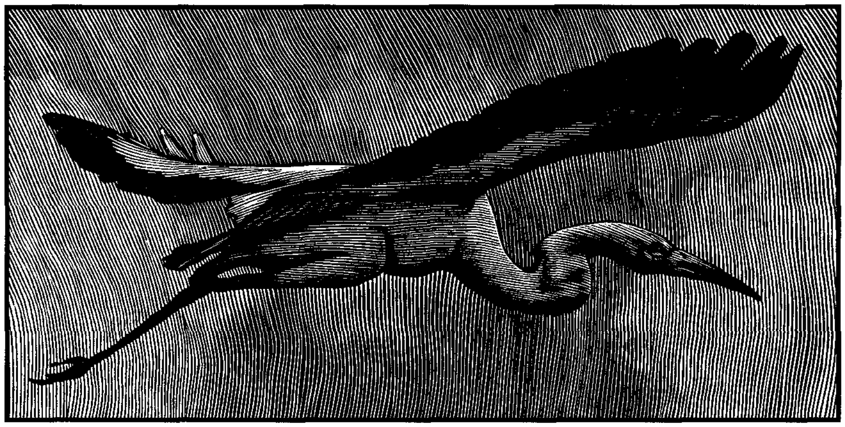
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her the great authors were actually the least interesting of the remains there because their spirits are the ones that have never died. It was the rest of the graveyard that teemed with possibility—with the kind of unknown spectres she could conjure and employ.

WITCHCRAFT, Amelia likes to stress, is simply "a natural ability" that some humans have developed—"a knack for something, like some people have good balance," she says. "Someone from thousands of years ago would think it was supernatural if I turned on a light. A lot of times we describe things as supernatural just because we can't explain them." She and her friends agree that most of the kids in their high school believe in some form of the paranormal, although, Amelia says, "obviously, some of them don't have the imagination to believe in anything." Science hasn't lost its status at fin-de-siècle Concord Carlisle, but it seems to coexist more easily in the minds of students with other versions of reality, such as telekinesis. Television shows like "Charmed" and "Bewitched" and "Buffy, the Vampire Slayer" are also big lunchroom topics. Amelia told me, though, that she was reluctant to see "The Blair Witch Project" because she was wary of a documentary-style Hollywood presentation of witchcraft. But when I invite her and her cousin Nate to accompany me to a screening they're game.

After the movie, over Chinese food, she and Nate debate whether the movie's killer was a psycho, or a witch employing astral projection, or a "psycho witch." ("Witches are just as susceptible to mental illness as anyone else," Amelia explains.) Nate tells an involved story about a protective spirit of some kind that breast-fed his baby sister, Bethany, and a doll that kept finding its way back to the sofa even after he had shut it in a closet. Amelia says that she isn't afraid of spirits, although, she adds, "I wouldn't go, Ah, it doesn't exist,' go bad-mouthing them. In the same way, I wouldn't say it doesn't exist, go bad-mouthing a Greek god. I stay respectful of things that could possibly harm me, but I don't really worry about them constantly."

And vampires?

"I know several hundred of them," she asserts.

Real or imaginary?

"They'd say they're real. But it's not like I'm going to meet them for breakfast. *Ohhh*, bad metaphor," she says, her voice trailing off at the thought of a vampire's breakfast.

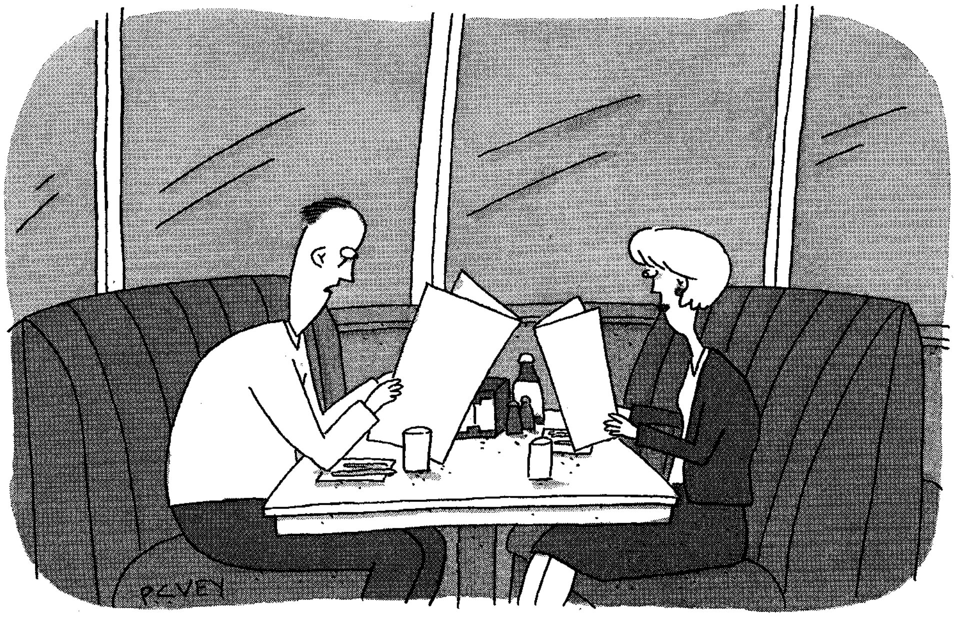
The "vampyre" is said to have been a persistent presence in the last century because of its adaptiveness—its ability to tap the vein of the individual imagination and draw out the anxieties of the age. Amelia says that what she likes about vampires is their "versatility"; they come in many varieties (with differing sleeping habits, mental powers, and reactions to religion). Still, their defining feature is their immortality, for which they are absolutely dependent on blood-feeding.

"The blood is life," Nate says, invoking Bram Stoker. Amelia frowns in concentration when I ask what the blood means to her. Finally, she says that the blood represents "different things to different vampires in different contexts."

Anne Rice is often credited with being the first author to write from the vampire's point of view, but her vampires—at least, in their personas (gay, male)—are radically different from herself. Amelia, on the other hand, has a disarmingly straightforward identification with her characters. Though vampires are traditionally characterized by their longing for humans, Amelia's humans are characterized by their jealousy of vampires. In Amelia's books, characters don't seem fully alive to their physical or emotional capacities until "the Change." When the vampire Aubrey asks Jessaca whether she'll drink his blood, she replies wryly, "You have to ask?"

AMELIA is as modest about her witchcraft as she is about her writing. "I only use spells when I believe they're necessary," she tells me. "The last spell I cast was during the last full moon. It was time for back to school. I worked out a spell for homework. It's not that I don't *want* to do my homework—it's that I forget it *exists*." She hesitates about showing me the spell, but finally relents. I'm not breaking any confidences to say that it involves cinnamon, because almost all her spells involve cinnamon, which she uses because she likes it and because it works for her. ("It's not the ingredients, it's the *mind power*," she stresses.) Then she does a complex Tarot reading for me and, finally, a yes-or-no divination, using her amber-eyed ankh.

Twice the pendant swings toward the positive, but then I ask a silent question: "Will this article be published?" Suddenly, the answer is crystal clear: No. Just as I'm falling into gloomy contemplation of the fact that, while we can write the future, the future gets the last word, Amelia gives me a quick glance and scoops the pendant up. She closes her fingers around it, looks back at me, and says, "Don't worry. The future can be changed. That's why it's good to know about it ahead of time." ♦



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ANNALS OF EDUCATION

SCHOOLS ARE HER BUSINESS

A young scholar proposes a radical plan.

JOHN CASSIDY

CAROLINE MINTER HOXBY, a thirty-three-year-old associate professor of economics at Harvard, earned her doctorate from M.I.T. just five years ago, and has published only a handful of papers in academic journals, but she has already established herself as one of the most talked-about young economists in the country. At a time when most of her colleagues toil in richly deserved obscurity, Hoxby's research, which attempts to show that public schools perform better when they face competition, that class size makes no difference to how students perform, and that teachers' unions make schools less productive, has been picked up by a number of publications, including *The Economist*, *Fortune*, and the *Wall Street Journal.* Some of Hoxby's colleagues dismiss her findings as inconclusive; a few suggest that she might be guilty of interpreting the evidence selectively. But nobody doubts that her findings, if they hold up, have important implications for the way our children are educated.

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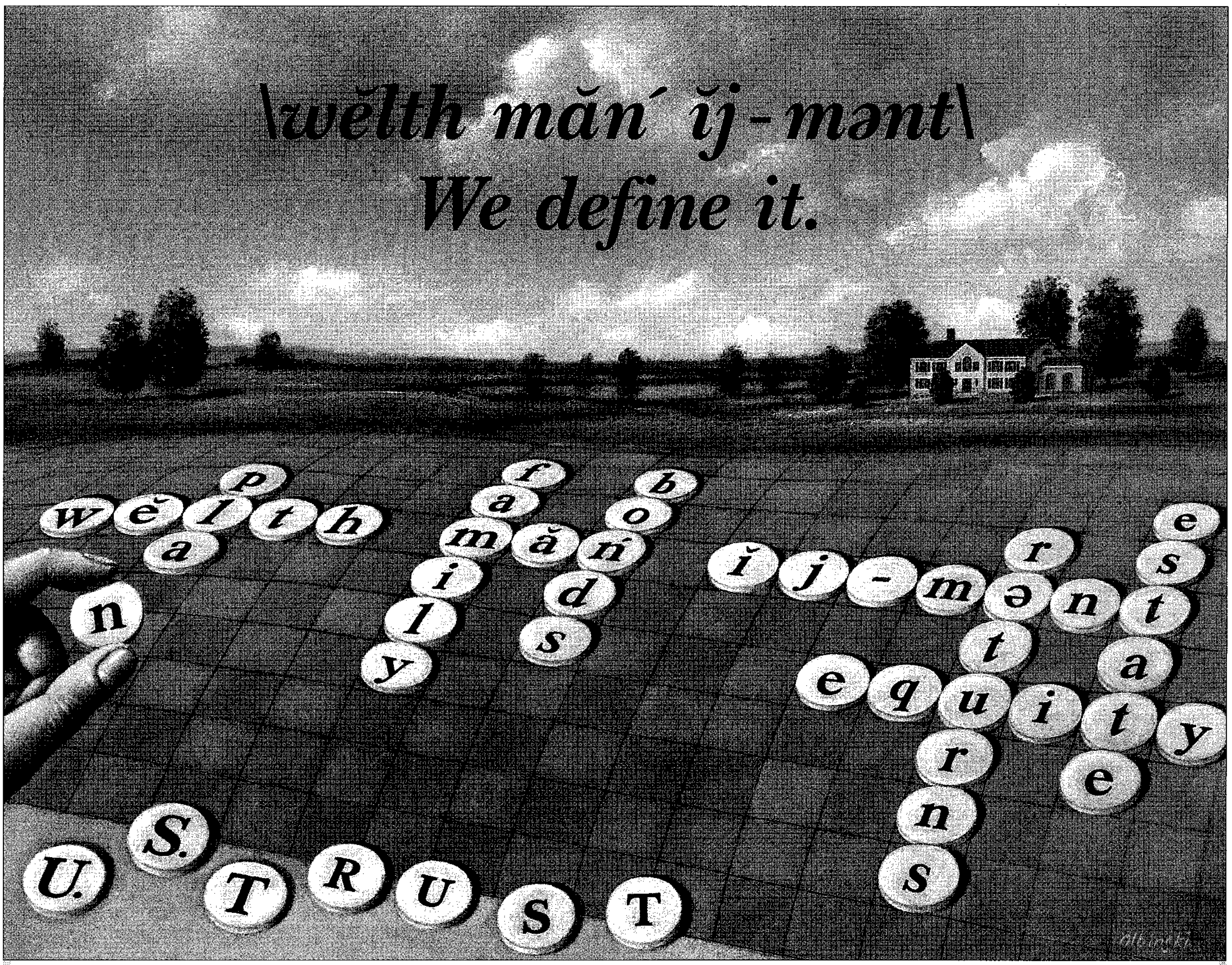
Caroline Hoxby, photographed at City on a Hill, a charter school in Boston.

KRISTIN CAPP

A few weeks ago, Hoxby was in Palo Alto to attend the first meeting of a new academic task force on K-12 education, which has been set up by the Hoover Institution, the conservative think tank at Stanford University. The ten other members of the group were older than Hoxby, and, not surprisingly, they turned out to be well-known critics of public schools. Among them were John Chubb, who co-founded Edison Schools, a private company that operates seventy-nine schools across the country; Diane Ravitch, a historian at New York University, who served as Assistant Secretary of Education in the Bush Administration; and Terry Moe, a Stanford political scientist who co-wrote the influential 1990 tract "Politics, Markets, and America's Schools," which argued that free-market principles should be applied to the public-school system. Before an audience of about a hundred people at the Stanford faculty club, John Raisian, the Hoover Institution's director, asked the task-force members to say what they would do if, by some good fortune, they were appointed czar of the American education system. When Hoxby—an attractive woman with light-brown skin, a long face, and brown eyes—got up to speak, she exuded self-assurance and intellectual energy. "If I am the czarina, I can recommend an ideal system," she began, with a smile. Then she described what she called an "ideal voucher system"—one in which every public-school student in the country would receive a voucher to cover tuition costs at the school of his or her parents' choice. She argued not only that such a system would force public schools to provide a better education but also that, if designed correctly, it could be used to attain other social goals, such as racial integration. For example, vouchers applied to tuition at racially integrated schools might be assigned a higher value than those used at poorly integrated schools.

Hoxby's suggestion couldn't be more topical. George W. Bush and John McCain both recently committed to the expansion of voucher programs and other types of school reform. As this school year began, more than ten thousand students were taking part in publicly funded voucher programs in Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Pensacola.



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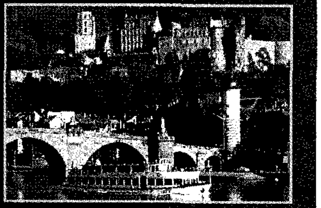

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With the debate about competition and public schools intensifying, proponents of radical reform are hailing Hoxby's research. "We all knew that competition works in other industries, but the education establishment said this was education: the laws of supply and demand don't apply," Terry Moe told me before making his own presentation. "Caroline did some very sophisticated work showing that they do apply after all."

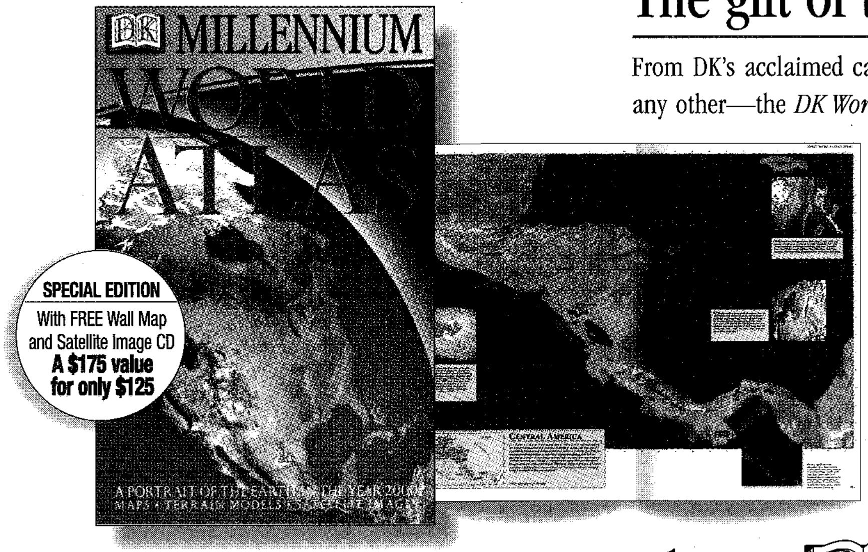
While Hoxby was in Palo Alto, we met for dinner in a homely Italian restaurant on University Avenue, the main drag in that Silicon Valley boom town. I asked her how she came to be associated with an ideologically driven place like the Hoover Institution. "It's much more ideological than I am," she said. "They kept asking me to work with them, and I kept saying no, because I couldn't fit it into my schedule. Then this task force came along, and it seemed to fit very well. But I am no more involved with them than I am with the MacArthur Foundation or the Brookings Institution." (Hoxby was due to present a paper at the MacArthur Foundation, in Chicago, a few days later. At Brookings, she acts as an adviser to the Brookings Papers on Education Policy.) "I'm not a very ideological person," she insisted. "Almost always, I choose a topic because there's something economics can say that hasn't been said before. I'm pretty much economics No. 1, everything else a distant second."

Economists have been interested in school vouchers since at least 1962, when Milton Friedman, a University of Chicago professor who is now a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, published "Capitalism and Freedom," in which he advocated a national system of tax-financed vouchers as a means of freeing the public-school system from state control. At the time, Friedman's idea was widely written off as the work of a right-wing crank, but even some left-wing economists, including Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, who are both at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, now favor vouchers as a means of empowering poor parents. Hoxby's enthusiasm for vouchers is rooted in the notion that economics explains more than just business. "I've always been interested in models of competition by firms, and it's just a very natural fit to apply these models to schools," she said. "I know that offends a lot of people in education, because they believe they are not producing regular goods. But the same basic issues that come up in the study of firms—competition, incentives, management control—all come up in schools."

In a competitive system, firms that make products consumers like will tend to prosper; those that don't will eventually go bust. The public-school system, needless to say, doesn't work that way. "Bad public schools are almost never punished, because there are kids there," Hoxby told me. "People say, 'These students are failing. They need more money spent on their schools, not less.' The incentives are perverse." In Hoxby's ideal world, things would be different: bad schools would see their budgets dwindle as disgruntled parents used their vouchers to switch their children to better schools. If failing schools didn't turn things around, they would eventually have to shut down. "It would be like restaurants," Hoxby said. "New, successful schools would take over from old failing schools, and the old ones would disappear." Many people inside the system argue that vouchers skim off the most able students, leaving the original schools, and the rest of the students, in even worse shape. Hoxby concedes this danger but argues that it would be eliminated if the voucher system was made universal. "The idea should be that every kid in Harlem would get a voucher," she said. "You don't want it to be just the two thousand kids with the most motivated parents getting them."

HOXBY was born in 1966, in Cleveland, the second of three daughters in what she describes as an upper-middle-class family. Her father, Steven Minter, who is part African-American and part Native American, was once the state Commissioner of Welfare in Massachusetts. (He later served as Under-Secretary of Education in the Carter Administration.) Her mother, Dolly Minter, who is of Eastern European extraction, was a schoolteacher, but she gave up her job to raise Caroline and her sisters. "When I was a kid, I was always aware of poor people, because my parents would take me on tours of housing projects every weekend," Hoxby said. "We couldn't go into the grocery store without all the welfare moms coming up and telling my father what was wrong with the programs." She was introduced to economics in the eighth grade, when she was assigned to read extracts from "The Wealth of Nations," by Adam Smith. "I read it, and it was, like, That's it—I'm going to become an economist," she recalled. "I never changed my mind."

In 1984, Hoxby left Shaker Heights Senior High, a school renowned for its integrated student body and the quality of its instruction, as class valedictorian and went east to Harvard. Four years later, she graduated summa cum laude. Her senior thesis, a statistical study of United States exports, won two prizes. After leaving Harvard, Hoxby went to Magdalen College, Oxford, on a Rhodes Scholarship. There she studied for a



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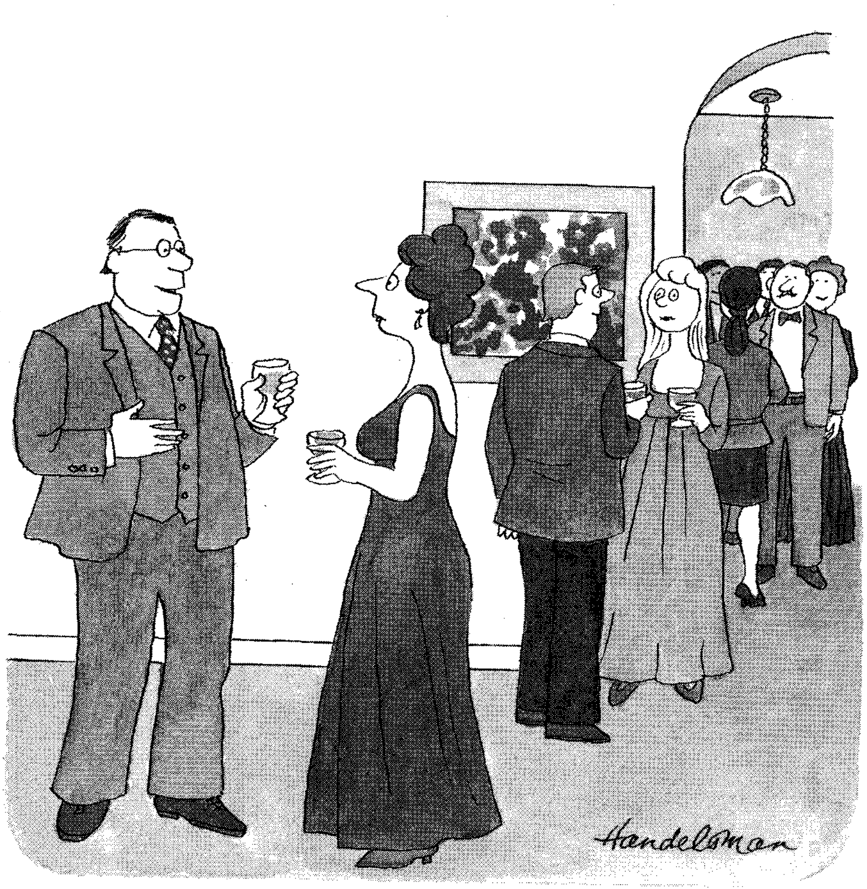

"I, too, want to preserve the environment just as it is: acid rain, holes in the ozone layer, lots of crap in the air."

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master's degree and wrote another thesis, arguing that blacks and other minorities who choose to invest less in education may be making the rational decision, because, given the discrimination they face in the job market, the returns on their educational investments are very uncertain. These days, she dismisses this idea as "probably wrong," but the thesis won her another prize.

In 1990, Hoxby entered the doctoral program in economics at M.I.T. "It was clear from the start that she had something special," David Laibson, an associate professor of economics at Harvard, who was in Hoxby's class at M.I.T., told me. "She was already doing serious research as the rest of us were just getting started." By her third year in graduate school, she had moved to New Haven to live with her boyfriend, Blair Hoxby, a Harvard classmate who was doing a doctorate in English at Yale, where he is now an assistant professor. Three days a week, she drove north, to Boston. On other days, she took the train south, to Princeton, where one of her graduate supervisors, Henry Farber, had taken a job. All that commuting paid off. By 1994, she had graduated from M.I.T., landed an assistant professorship at Harvard, and married Blair Hoxby. The couple live in an eighteenth-century farmhouse thirty miles west of Boston. These days, it is the man in the family who does the long-distance commuting.

THE work that made Hoxby's reputation was carried out while she was still at M.I.T. Other economists had speculated that public schools might benefit from competition, but few had come up with any empirical data to support their arguments. Hoxby set out to fill in the blanks. Her key insight was that some public schools already faced a limited form of competition: from better public schools in adjoining school districts, because parents will move to send their kids to them, and from private schools, especially parochial schools. Hoxby

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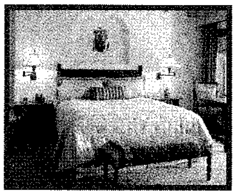

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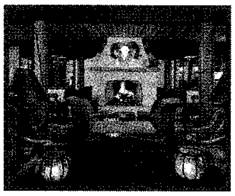

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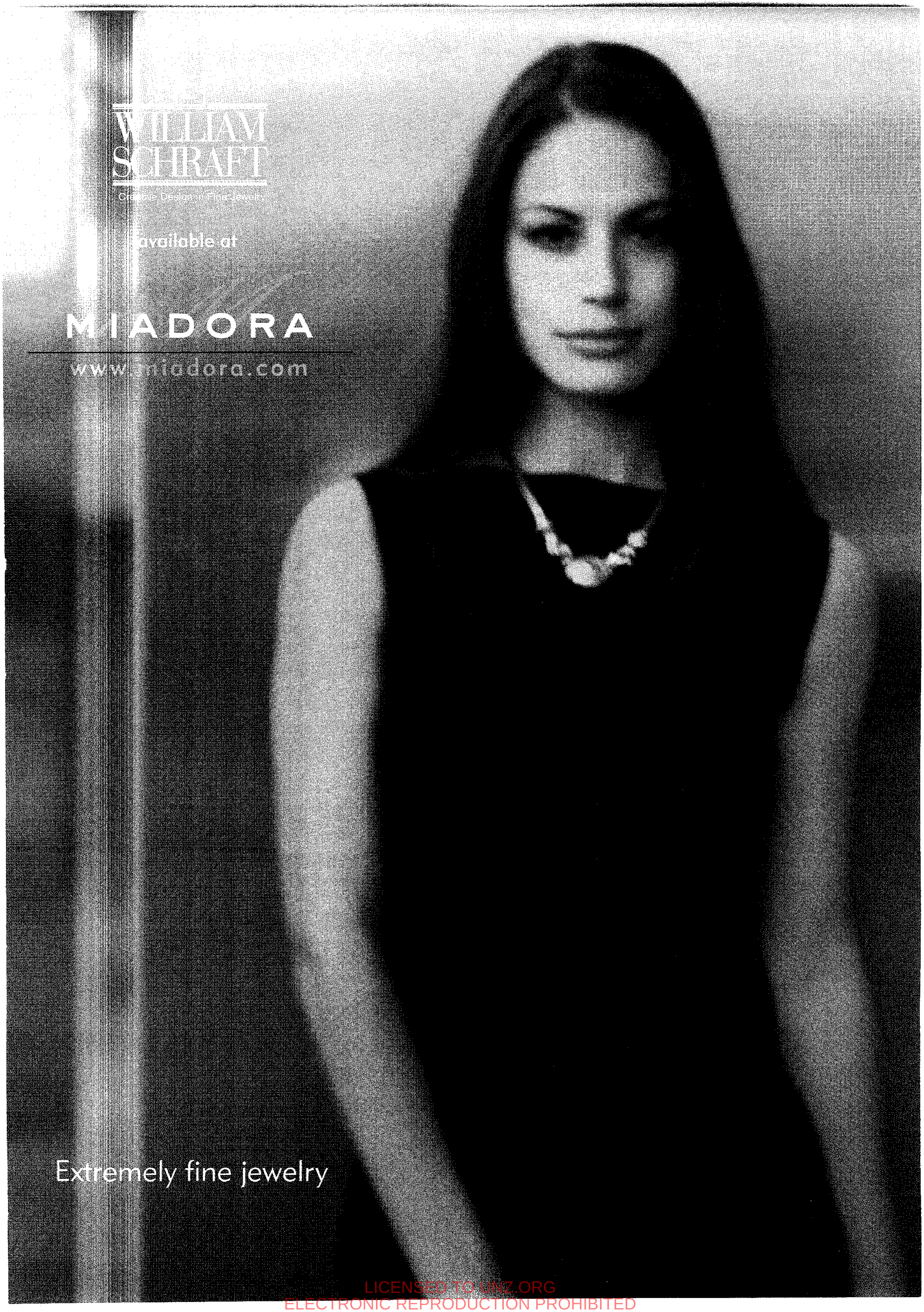
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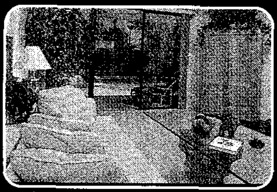

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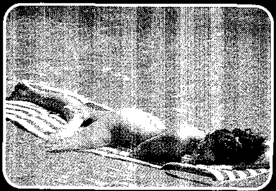

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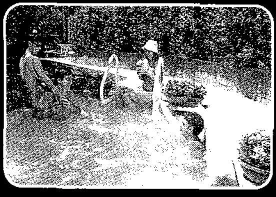

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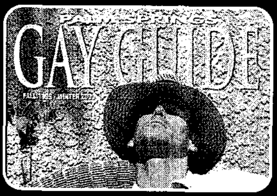

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obtained data on every school district in the country, from Boston, where there are seventy in the metropolitan area, to Miami, where there is just one. She found that in areas where there was competition, public-school students obtained higher test scores, even though total spending on schools was significantly lower there. Her conclusion, as expressed in an article published by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, was unequivocal: "An increase in choice improves student achievement even while it accomplishes substantial cost savings." Though Hoxby was a young and inexperienced scholar, her research was quickly singled out by economists who believe in the power of market forces—a group that includes most of the profession. "It establishes in a very convincing way the effects of competition, and the effects of lack of competition, on education," James Heckman, a professor at the University of Chicago, told me recently.

Hoxby also produced evidence in her dissertation suggesting that public-school students tend to perform slightly worse in areas where teachers' unions are strong. In 1996, she followed up that broadside with a paper claiming that a reduction in class size has no discernible impact on students' performance. Between the 1970-71 school year and the 1990-91 school year, the average class size at public schools fell from 22.3 to 17.3. The conventional wisdom among educators was that the reduction in class size would lead to better outcomes for students, but that didn't happen. Many factors could have been responsible, but Hoxby believes that the most convincing explanation is an economic one: given the rigid pay scales and work rules imposed by the unions, public-school teachers had little incentive to improve their performance. In her study, she took one state, Connecticut, and looked at the natural variation in class size from year to year caused by random factors like changes in birth rates. After comparing the performance of students in small classes with those in larger ones, she concluded that class size has no effect at all on student achievement. "Small class size is an opportunity for teachers to do something, but it doesn't guarantee it," she told me. "The reason that we

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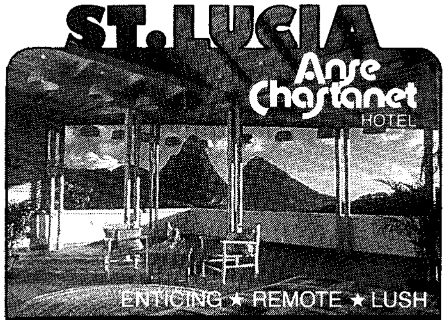

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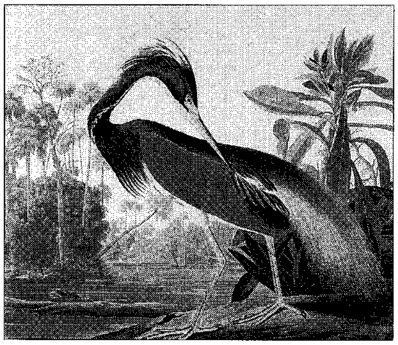

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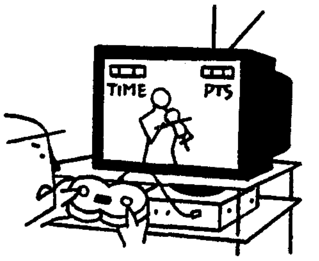
have put all these extra resources into the classroom without much return is that we haven't, generally, put any incentives in place with the extra spending. It has just been: give them the money and hope that it works."

In the early nineties, widespread disappointment with the performance of public schools, despite higher spending, encouraged states like Minnesota and California to experiment with charter schools, which are financed by taxpayers but independently operated. In the last few years, the charter-school model has been adopted in many parts of the country, but there is little data available about how those schools perform compared with public schools. Hoxby, in her usual determined manner, went about getting the numbers. In a new paper, entitled "Would School Choice Change the Teaching Profession?," she reports the results of a survey of eight hundred and fifty charter schools which she carried out with a couple of research assistants. The survey shows that teachers in charter schools are generally younger and better educated than teachers in public schools, and they feel that they have more control over the curriculum than public-school teachers do. The salaries of charter-school teachers are lower than those of public-school teachers, but many of them receive performance-related bonuses. "In short, school choice is likely to be good for the teaching profession," Hoxby concludes. "The profession would improve, although organizations that depend on incumbent teachers, such as teachers' unions, would not enjoy the transition."



A COUPLE of weeks ago, I flew to Boston and watched Hoxby make a presentation at an M.I.T. graduate seminar about college tuition costs, another of her research interests. Between 1989 and 1991, the Justice Department carried out an investigation into alleged price-fixing at élite East Coast colleges, including the Ivy League schools. Before the investigation began, senior administrators from those colleges got together every year, ostensibly to discuss their financial-aid policies. In the wake of the investigation, the government sued some of the colleges, and the annual meetings were suspended. Although the lawsuit was eventually settled, the meetings never resumed. Hoxby argued that the government's action did nothing to reduce tuition inflation but did prompt the colleges to switch some of their financial support from need-based aid to merit scholarships. As a result, Hoxby continued, the rate of progress toward diversity at these colleges has slowed sharply.

In reaching her conclusions, Hoxby had compared the entrance policies of the East Coast colleges with those of another group of colleges, including Stanford, Rice, and Caltech, which she claimed were just as selective. At the seminar, Paul Osterman, an M.I.T. economist, disagreed, arguing that these schools were less selective and could not be fairly compared with the first group. Hoxby seemed slightly disconcerted.

"No. That is an East Coast bias," she said sharply.

Osterman didn't back off. He asked the other seminar participants to imagine that they were parents choosing a college for their children and they had to pick one list over the other. If they did this, he said, the vast majority would choose the East Coast group.

"I hate to say this, but you're just wrong," Hoxby snapped. "These colleges are equally selective."

Osterman wasn't the first scholar to challenge Hoxby's findings. She is well liked and respected at Harvard, where she is expected to get tenure within a couple of years, but elsewhere I picked up an undercurrent of antagonism toward her, not all of which can be written off as intramural rivalry. The critics weren't willing to denigrate the work of a young scholar on the record, but they made clear their feelings that Hoxby has an agenda. "The perception is that she has strong views," Henry Farber, the Princeton professor who helped supervise Hoxby's doctoral dissertation, told me. "I don't want to say she's biased, but it's clear that she's motivated by the idea that competition is likely to be a force for good." Farber went on, "I'm a big fan of hers, but I understand that there are other people who aren't." I also detected a feeling in some quarters that the quality of Hoxby's papers isn't the only reason she has been so widely recognized. One of Hoxby's admirers, Jim Heckman, of the University of Chicago, conceded that this might be true. "As a group, many blacks are often perceived as strong supporters of government intervention. Because of Hoxby's views on competition, many conservatives have adopted her as a political darling." (At the same time, however, Heckman described Hoxby as an "extremely scrupulous" researcher.)

The most serious criticism of Hoxby—that some of her conclusions may not stand up to inspection—is based partly on a paper that grew out of her doctoral dissertation. In assessing the impact of competition on public schools, she used a statistical technique known as "instrumental variables," in which the independent variables in her study (the number of school districts in an area and the number of private schools in a school district) were replaced by other, associated variables. Economists agree that this tactic is sometimes necessary because of potential reverse causation—the way public schools perform may affect the creation of new school districts and private schools, rather than vice versa—but the way Hoxby did it was novel. To substitute for the number of school districts in a geographic region, she used the number of rivers and streams in the area, arguing that school districts often follow topographic features. Even if she was justified in doing so, and there is some debate about that, it may have biased her results, because rivers and streams are also correlated with other factors that affect educational performance, such as industrialization and urbanization. Moreover, Hoxby's results have not yet been fully replicated by other economists. A couple of graduate students at Princeton are attempting to do just that, but she has refused to give them her data until her paper, which she has submitted to the *American Economic Review*, is published, at which point she will release all her data on the Internet. "I don't think that Caroline is doing anything that other people wouldn't defend as reasonable," Angus Deaton, an economist at Princeton, told me. "But if you expect to influence public policy there is a higher standard of openness and accountability." (Hoxby has given her data to several economists working on other studies, and they have confirmed some of her findings.)

Hoxby's claim that class size doesn't matter is also questionable. Despite the national figures, many economists agree that the most detailed evidence on this subject comes from a controlled experiment that was carried out in Tennessee, beginning in 1986. Eleven thousand six hundred students in kindergarten through third grade were randomly assigned to classes of different sizes, and their academic progress was monitored for several years. In all four grades, the students in the smallest classes did best. Students from poor and minority backgrounds appeared to benefit most from being in small classes, and the gains seemed to last

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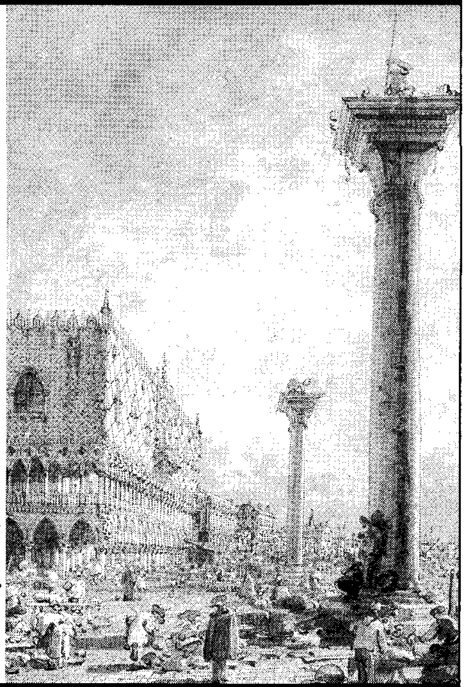

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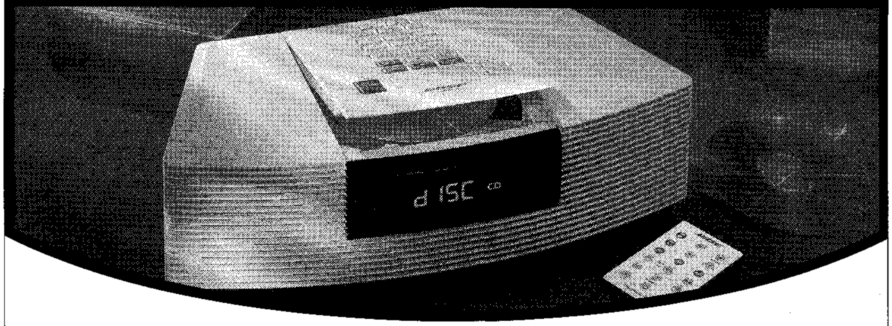

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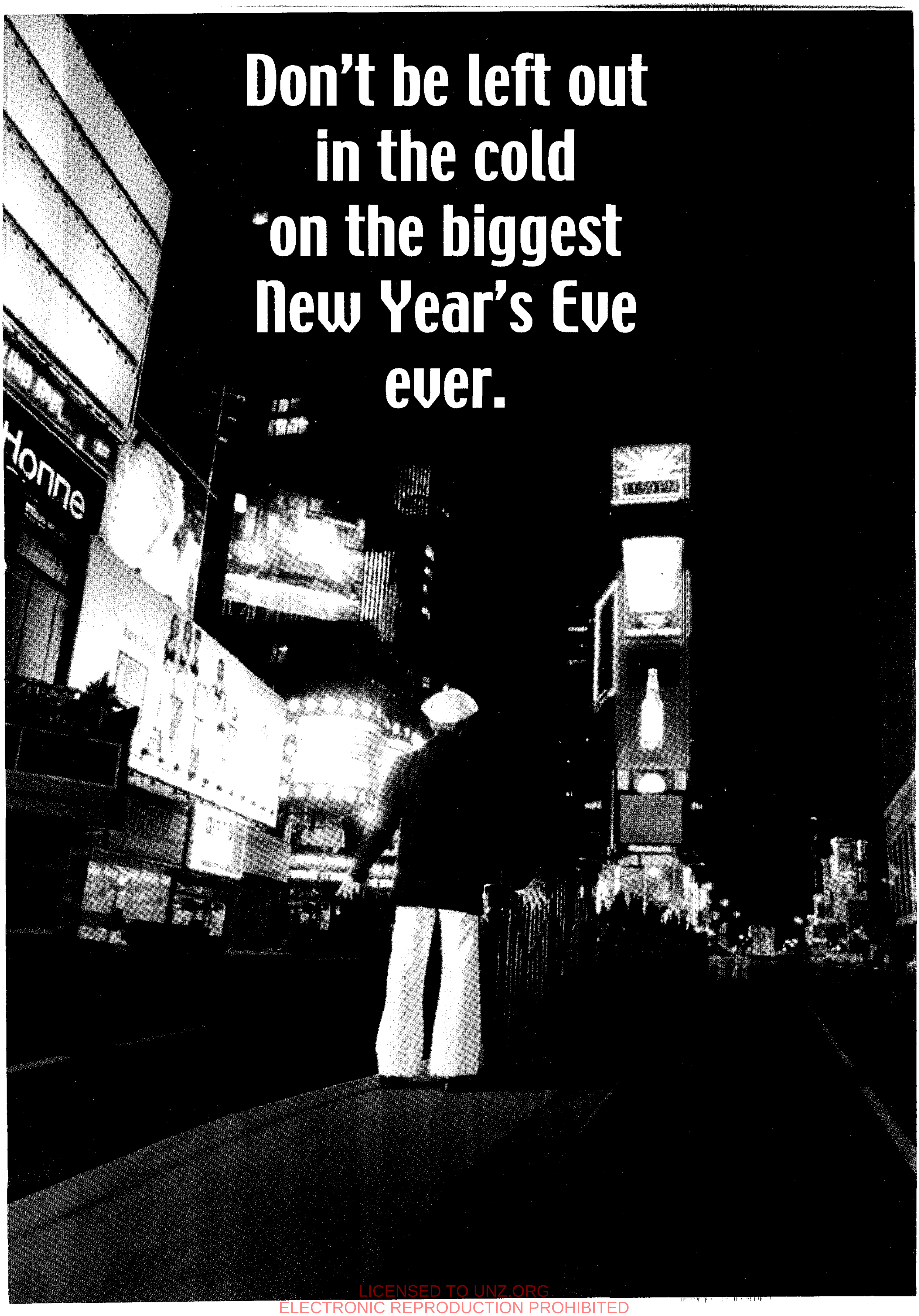
until at least seventh grade. When I asked Hoxby about these results, she had no argument with their accuracy but questioned their reliability, because the teachers in the Tennessee experiment may have worked harder in the knowledge that they were being assessed. This is possible, of course, but it didn't sound terribly convincing.

The same might be said of Hoxby's underlying argument that the public-school system is in such a state of crisis that a radical reform like vouchers is essential. It is far from clear that public schools are failing the majority of students. Standardized-test scores have remained pretty steady since 1970, more students are going on to college than ever before, and the gap in test scores between white and minority students has narrowed considerably. (Media stories about declining S.A.T. scores are misleading: with college admissions rising, many more students are taking the test.) More than eighty-five per cent of American children attend public schools, and most of them are adequately educated. The crisis in public education is largely confined to the inner cities, and even there the effectiveness of vouchers is unproven. "I like Caroline's work, I respect it, and I think a lot of other people do, too, but I don't think it has been definitive enough to settle things," Josh Angrist, an economist and a statistical expert at M.I.T., told me. "The impact of competition on education is still an open question."

If some of Hoxby's findings have been questioned, her ambition and work ethic stand unimpeached. She is a popular, if demanding, teacher at Harvard, where I recently sat in on the first class of the fall term in her undergraduate course on the economics of education. The classroom, built for sixty people, contained about double that number, with students sitting and standing in the aisles, but it steadily emptied out as Hoxby started in on the syllabus by handing out three pages of equations and then running through a mathematical model of how people decide to invest in education. Those students who were looking for an easy elective quickly got the message. By the end of the class, there were seats for everybody.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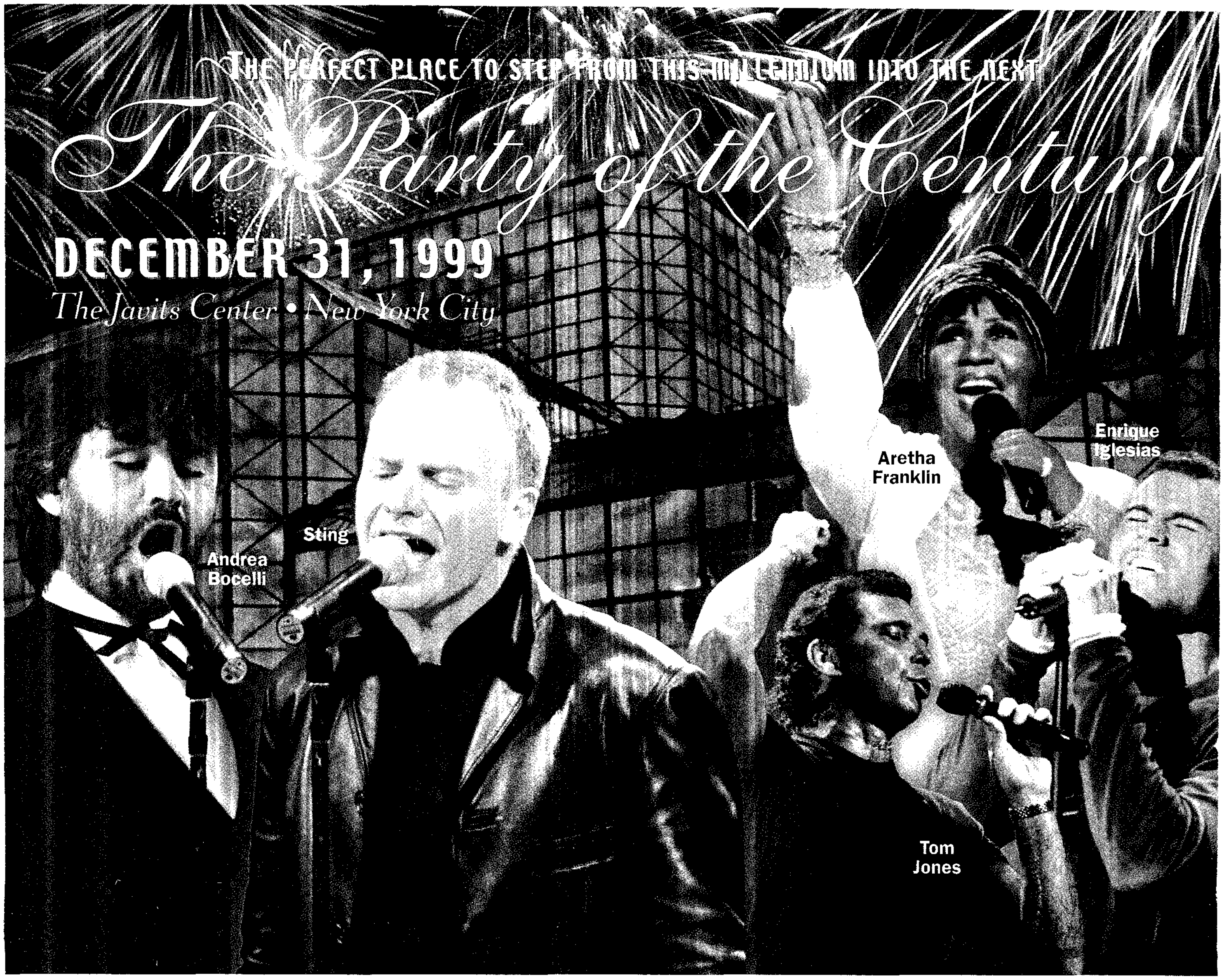
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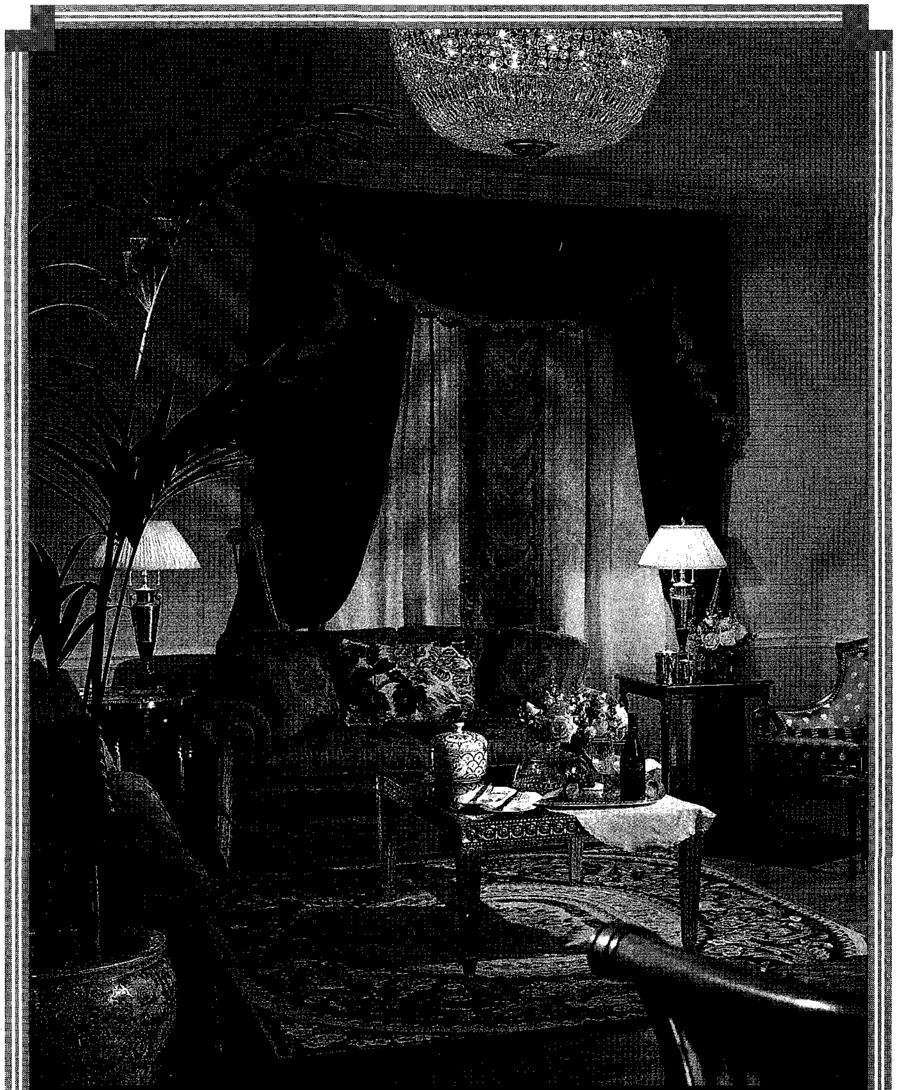
In her spare time, Hoxby is an accomplished French cook, a gardener, a choral singer, a classical-music fan (Palestrina is her favorite composer), a museumgoer, a hungry consumer of nineteenth-century novels—she's currently reading Henry James—and a rescuer of stray animals. She appears to subsist on coffee and four hours of sleep a night: she sent me E-mail posted at 3:36 A.M. Over dinner one evening in Harvard Square, I asked what drives her to work so hard. "I don't know," she replied. "My sisters are not like me. I am kind of like my father. My father"—who now runs the Cleveland Foundation, a community-based philanthropic organization—"does a scary amount of work." The mention of her father brought up Hoxby's mixed-race heritage, which she hadn't previously mentioned despite the fact that much of her research is about how minority children fare in public schools. She said that she thought of herself as both black and white, but added that education reform wasn't a racial issue. "Pretty much all poor people in the U.S. who are immobile get pretty poor schools," she said. When I asked if she had ever felt discriminated against, she laughed and said only in Oxford, where she felt like a colonial. "I'm much more aware of being a woman than I am of being a minority," she added. And she went on, "Most men in economics think that women aren't very good at math, aren't very rigorous, and aren't very good at theory. You have to prove to them that you can do these things."

Hoxby has certainly done that. Her work also demonstrates that economists still have significant things to say about important subjects. Ultimately, however, her reputation will depend, at least in part, on the fate of the education reforms that she supports so vociferously. The nation's most closely studied voucher scheme began in Milwaukee, in 1990, and it now involves about eight thousand students from poor backgrounds. Cecilia Rouse, an economist at Princeton, has produced the most extensive assessment of its effects. According to Rouse, during their first four years in the Milwaukee program students who received vouchers and went to private schools fared no differently in reading than similar students who attended regular public



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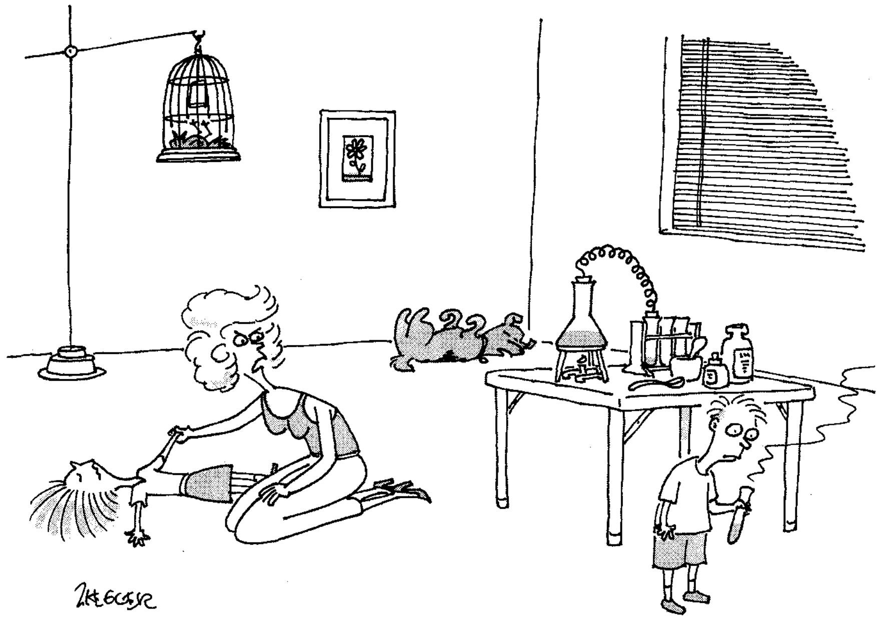
schools, but they did slightly better in math. However, Rouse also found that students who attended special public schools, where classes were smaller and spending was higher, exhibited similar gains in math, and in reading they actually outperformed students in the voucher program.

If these findings are validated elsewhere, the benefits of school choice may turn out to be a lot less dramatic than its supporters hoped. When I mentioned Rouse's research, and similar research conducted by Harvard's Paul Peterson, to Hoxby, she conceded that the results from existing voucher schemes are modest, given the "wildly inflated expectations" of some people in the pro-voucher camp, but she also argued that the results may be more dramatic in the long run. "The reality is that schools are just not that important compared to parents," she said. "By no means all of the variation in academic achievement can be explained, but of the part we can explain the vast majority is related to families." This sounded a tad strange from a strong proponent of choice-based reform. If parents and social background are what matter most, isn't the current focus on vouchers and charter schools misplaced? Shouldn't more attention be directed toward the restoration of stable families and decent neighborhoods where children are encouraged to learn? Hoxby doesn't exactly disagree with this analysis—she is writing a paper for the Hoover Institution about the central role of families in education—but she insists that the issues of school choice and families are linked. "One of the strengths of charter schools and voucher schemes is that they can have a contract with parents that says, 'This is what we expect you to do,' " she told me. "The parents don't necessarily need sanctions, but they need encouragement. Because they have made the choice, and they have made the investment, they get more involved."

Hoxby, however, sometimes seems to overlook the fact that the United States, which has the most highly evolved free market in the developed world, also has the most poverty and inequality, and that the failings of the public-school system may be at least as much a consequence of that sad phenomenon as a cause of it. (With a fifth of the nation's children being raised in poverty, is it any surprise that some public schools have problems?) Moreover, despite her skills as an economist, or possibly because of them, Hoxby occasionally appears blind to the fact that free-market economics is an ideology as well as a science, and that, like all ideologies, it should be treated with a fair amount of skepticism. "I don't have preferences," she told me at one point. "I am just an economist." Alas, things are not that simple. ◆



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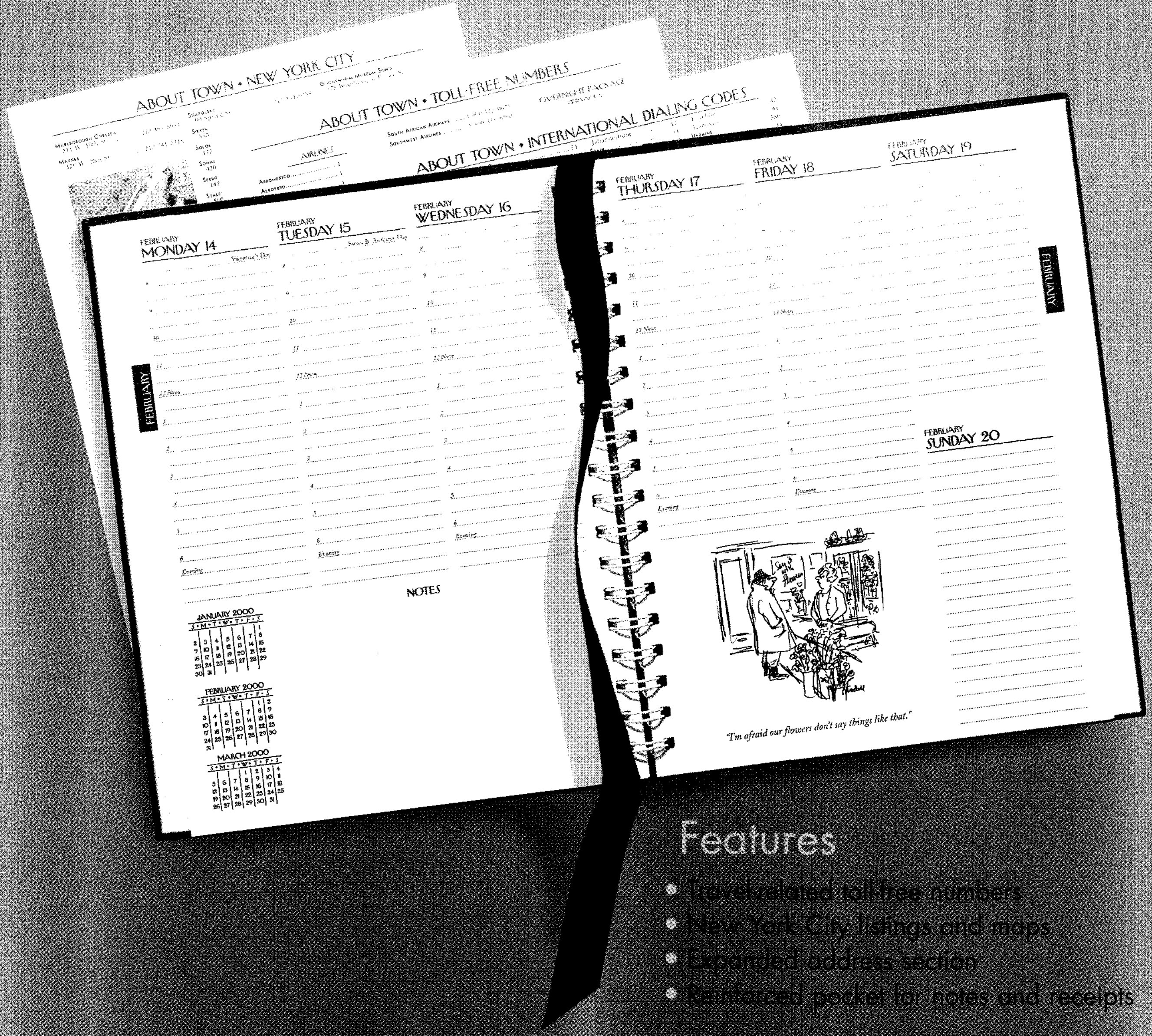

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REFLECTIONS

MY MISSPENT YOUTH

How the author's Manhattan dream turned into a credit-card nightmare.

BY MEGHAN DAUM

A FEW months ago, I was walking down West End Avenue, in Manhattan, and I remembered with a sadness that nearly knocked me off my feet just why I'd come to New York seven years ago, and why I was now about to leave. Certain kinds of buildings seem almost too gorgeous to exist—in the United States, anyway—and I'm still amazed that massive, ornate residences like 838 West End Avenue, with its yellow façade and geometric terra-cotta panels, or 305 Riverside Drive, with its elegantly carved limestone cornices, receive mail and spill kids out of their front doors like pretty much any domicile anywhere. When I was growing up in northern New Jersey, just twenty-five miles from Manhattan, I had no idea that ordinary people could live in such places. Then, when I was seventeen, I walked into an apartment at West End Avenue and 104th Street and decided that I had to be one of those people.

It was the summer of 1987, and I was learning how to drive a stick shift. My father, who is a composer, had allowed me to drive him to Manhattan in our Plymouth Horizon to drop off some scores with a music copyist. There was nothing particularly striking about the copyist's apartment: it was a modest four-room prewar with moldings around the ceiling, and I have since mentally supplied it with faded Persian rugs, NPR playing on the radio, and porcelain hexagonal tiles that were coming loose in the bathroom. It's difficult to imagine a time when I didn't walk into someone's apartment and immediately start the income-to-rent-ratio calculations, and I would now guess that the apartment had been rent-controlled for decades, and that the copyist paid perhaps three hundred dollars a month. But on that summer night, looking out the living-room window toward the river that so famously and effectively keeps *here* safely away from *there*, money was the last thing on my mind; I just knew that this was where I wanted to live, and from that moment on every decision I made was based on that conviction.

I've always been somebody who exerts a great deal of energy to get my realities to match my fantasies. I'm also pretty good at "getting by"—especially if you apply the increasingly common definition of the term, which has more to do with keeping up appearances than with keeping things under control. So it wasn't until recently that I realized I wasn't having such a good time in New York anymore. Like a social smoker whose supposedly endearing desire to emulate Marlene Dietrich has landed her in a cancer ward, I have recently woken up to the frightening fallout of my own romantic notions of life in the big city: I'm twenty-nine years old, and I am completely over my head in debt. I have not made a life for myself; I have purchased a life for myself.

For the better part of the last year, the balance of my Visa card has hovered around seven thousand dollars. A significant chunk of that debt comes from medical expenses, particularly the bills for a series of dental procedures I needed. As a freelance writer, it would cost me three hundred dollars a month to buy health insurance in New York State. That's far more than I can afford, so I don't have any. Although I try to pay the three-hundred-and-thirty-nine-dollars-a-quarter charge to keep a hospitalization insurance policy that will cover me if some major disaster befalls, I am often late in paying, and it gets cancelled. But medical expenses represent only a fraction of my troubles. I also need to make an estimated quarterly tax payment of fifty-four hundred dollars this month, which is going to be tough, because I recently paid back three thousand dollars to my now ex-boyfriend, who lent me money to pay last year's taxes, and I still owe three hundred dollars to the accountant who prepared the return. My checking account is overdrawn by a thousand seven hundred and eighty-four dollars. I have no savings, no investments, no pension fund, and no inheritance on the horizon. I have student loans from graduate school amounting to sixty thousand dollars. I pay $448.83 per month on these loans, installments that barely cover the interest that's accruing.

It's tempting to go into a litany of all the things that I do not spend money on. I have no dependents, not even a cat or a fish. I do not have a car. I've worn the same four pairs of shoes for the past three years. Much of the clothing in my closet has been there since the early nineties, the rare additions usually taking the form of a sixteen-dollar shirt from Old Navy, a discounted dress from Loehmann's, or a Christmas sweater from my mother. I've lived without a roommate only for the last two years. My rent, a thousand and fifty-five dollars a month for a four-hundred-square-foot apartment, is, as we say in New York City when describing the Holy Grail, below market. I do not own expensive stereo equipment, and even though I have a television, I cannot bring myself to spend the thirty-five dollars a month on cable, which, curiously, I've deemed an indulgence. With the exception of a trip to Egypt to visit a friend, in 1998, I have not spent money on overseas travel. I've still never been to Europe.

Instead, I've confined my spending to certain ephemeral luxuries that have come to seem like necessities. I'll go to Starbucks in the morning, and then order sushi for lunch. I'll meet a friend for drinks and drop forty-five dollars on Merlot and chicken satay. I make long-distance phone calls almost daily, with no thought of peak calling hours or dime-a-minute rates. I have a compulsive need to keep fresh-cut flowers in my apartment at all times, and spend eight to ten dollars a week on tulips from the Korean market. But these extravagances are merely symptoms of a larger delusion. It's easier to feel guilt over spending sixty dollars on a blender, as I did last month, than to examine the more elaborate reasons that I've found it increasingly impossible to live within my means.

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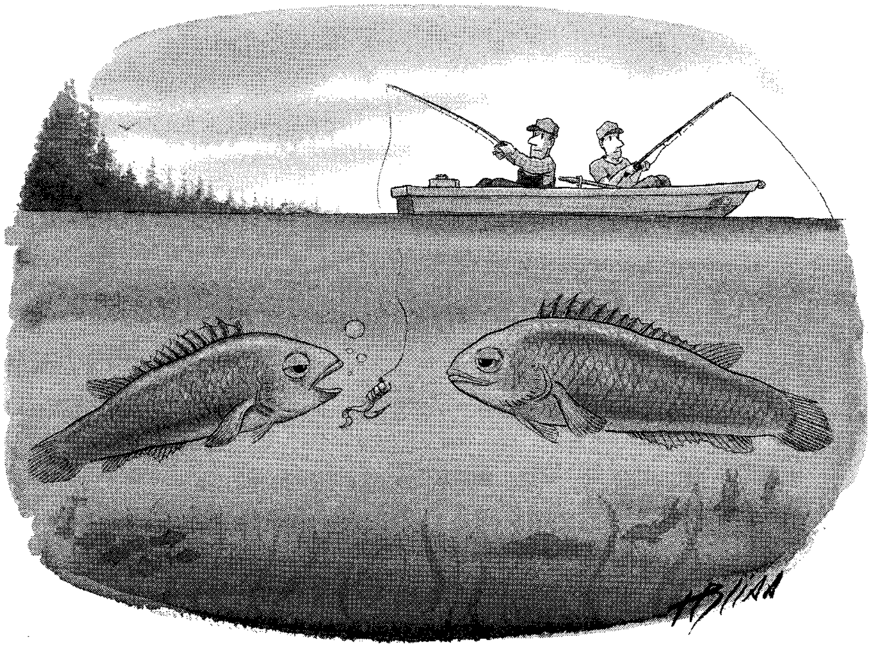
Despite following the urban striver's guide to success, I was seventy-five thousand dollars in the hole.

ISTVAN BANYAI

Once you're in this kind of debt—and by "kind" I'm talking less about numbers than about my particular brand of debt—all those bills start not to matter anymore. If I allowed them to matter, I would become so panicked that I wouldn't be able to work, which would only set me back further. I've also noticed that my kind of debt is surprisingly socially acceptable. After all, I went into debt for my education and my career—broad categories with room for copious rationalizations, and I make full use of them. I live in the most expensive city in the country because I have long believed that my career is dependent upon it. I spend money on Martinis and expensive dinners because, as is typical among my species of debtor, I tell myself that Martinis and expensive dinners are the entire point—the point of being young, the point of living in New York City, the point of living. In this frame of mind, the dollars spent, like the workings of a machine which no one bothers to understand, become an abstraction, a vehicle of taste.

As I try to sort out the origins of my present financial situation, I always come back to the ineffable hankering I had as a teen-ager for some sort of earthier, more "intellectual" life style. I come from an affluent New Jersey suburb whose main draw is its good public-school system, but I wanted to live someplace that looked like Mia Farrow's apartment in "Hannah and Her Sisters." (Little did I know that it *was* Mia Farrow's apartment.) To me, this kind of space connoted not wealth but urbanity. These were places where the paint was peeling and the rugs were frayed and the hallways were lined with books; places where smart people sat around drinking gin and tonics, having interesting conversations, and living, according to my logic, in an authentic way. As far as I was aware at seventeen, rich was something else entirely. Rich meant monstrous Tudor-style houses in the ritzy section of my town. Rich was driving a BMW to school. I had the distinct feeling that my orthodontist, who had a sprawling ranch house with front steps that were polished to look like ice, was rich. None of these particular trappings of wealth held my attention. In fact, nothing outside of the movies really held my at-



"Ooh, look, Tom. A bright-yellow rubber worm with a sharp metal hook in it."

• •

tention until that night in 1987 when I saw the apartment on 104th Street.

I planned my escape from the suburbs through the standard channels: college selection. My logic, informed by a combination of college guidebooks and the alma maters of the brides featured in the *Times* wedding announcements, went something like this: Columbia rather than N.Y.U., Wisconsin rather than Texas, Yale rather than Harvard, Vassar rather than Smith. My ranking system had little to do with the academic merits of the schools. It was more a game of degrees of separation between me and an apartment full of houseplants on the Upper West Side. Somehow, Vassar emerged as the best contender for closing that gap. I wanted so badly to go to a particular kind of artsy college and mix with a particular kind of artsy crowd that I wasted an alarming amount of time during my senior year of high school throwing trash into various wastebaskets from across the room, saying, "If I make this shot, I get into Vassar."

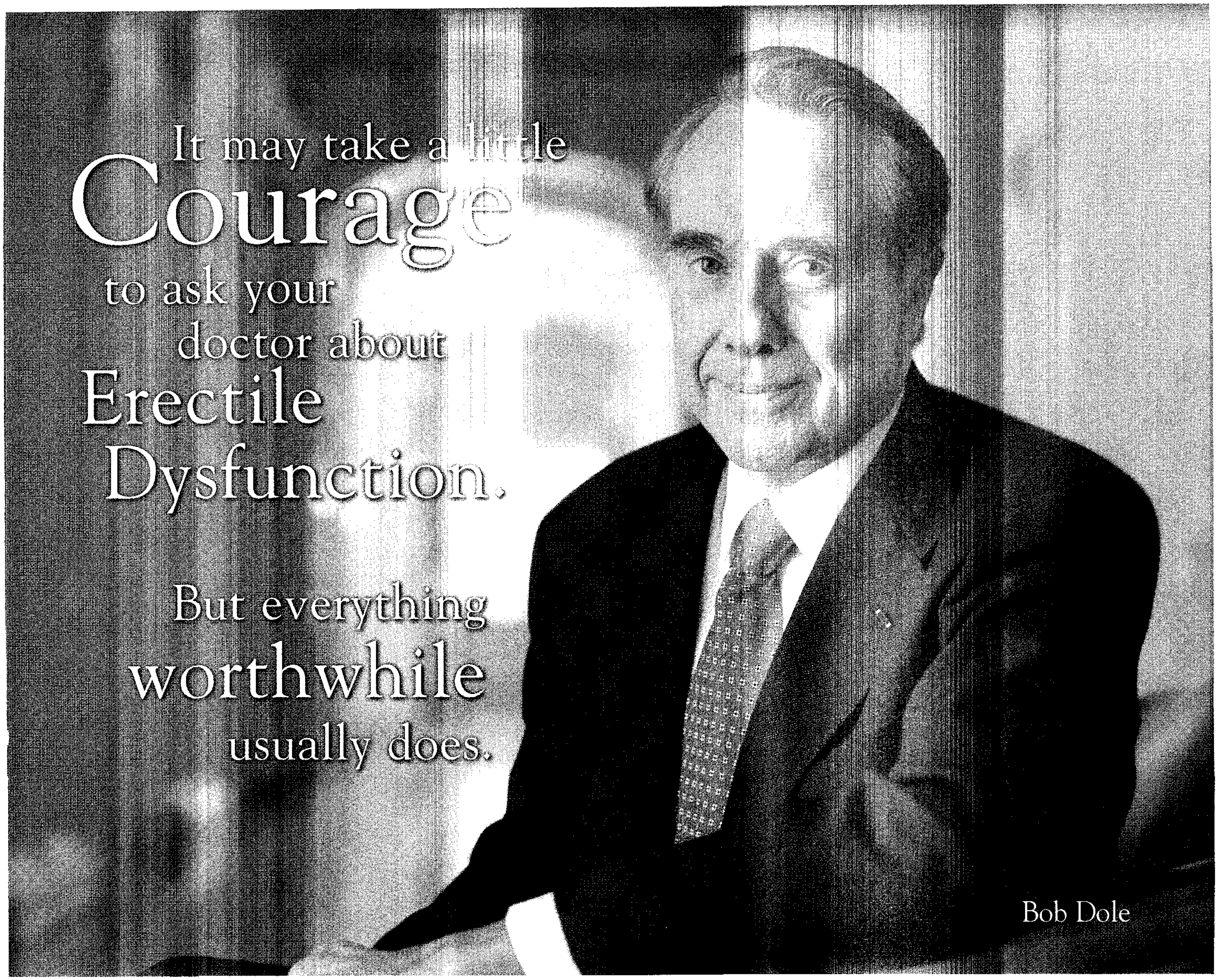
As it turned out, I did go to Vassar, and although it would be five years until I entered my debting era, my time there did more than expand my intellect: it expanded my sense of entitlement so much that, by the end, I had no ability to distinguish myself from the many extremely wealthy people I encountered there. A sense of entitlement can certainly be an asset, but it has also played a supporting role in my financial demise—mostly because it made it hard to recognize where ambition and chutzpah end and potential bankruptcy begins.

WHEN I graduated, in 1992, I followed a herd of my classmates into Manhattan; many of them moved back in with their parents on Park Avenue. I got an entry-level job in publishing, and, along with a couple of friends, rented a five-room prewar apartment with chipping paint on 100th Street off Riverside Drive, a mere five blocks from the scene of my high-school epiphany. Such expert marksmanship! I was ecstatic. My job, as an editorial assistant at a glossy fashion magazine, paid eighteen thousand dollars a year. The woman who hired me, a fifties-era Vassar graduate, told me that she hoped I had an independent source of income, as I certainly wouldn't be able to support myself on my salary. But I did support myself. My roommates—an elementary-school teacher, who was making nineteen thousand dollars a year, and a film student, who worked part time at a non-profit arts organization—supported themselves, too. We each paid around five hundred and fifty dollars a month in rent and lived as recent graduates should, eating ramen noodles and ninety-nine-cent White Rose macaroni and cheese.

Looking back, I see those years as a cheap, happy time. It was a time during which a certain kind of poverty was appropriate. Unlike the West Seventies and Eighties, my neighborhood seemed like a place for people who knew the city, for people *from* the city. Though I was living hand to mouth, I loved it there, and looked forward to moving ahead in my career and one day being able to afford my own place in the neighborhood. Then, that seemed well within the realm of possibility. It was 1993, I was twenty-three, and I'd received a raise, so that I was earning twenty-one thousand dollars a year. I had no idea that this was the closest I'd be to financial solvency for at least the next decade.

I'd been told I was lucky to have got a job at a magazine—I had, after all, graduated into what was being called the worst job market in twenty years—and even though I had little interest in its subject matter, I didn't dare turn down the position. Within my first week on the job, I found myself immersed in a culture of money and celebrity. Socialites sat on the editorial board in order to report on trends among the rich and famous. Editorial assistants who earned eighteen thousand dollars managed to wear Prada, have regular facials, and rent time-shares in the Hamptons. Many of them lived in doorman buildings, for which their parents helped foot the bill.

This wasn't my scene. I felt as far away from my "Hannah and Her Sisters" fantasy as I had in the suburbs. After a year of office work, I decided that an M.F.A. in creative writing would provide the most direct route to literary legitimacy. I applied to Columbia, which, not coincidentally, happened to be within walking distance of my apartment. It also has one of the most expensive writing programs in the country, a fact that was easy to forget, because the students, for the most part, seemed so down to earth and modest. In their flannel shirts and roach-infested student housing, they seemed as earnest and poor as I was, and I figured that if they could take out twenty-



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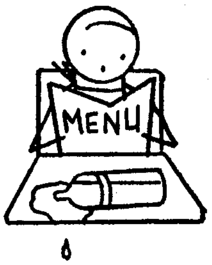
thousand-dollar-a-year loans, so could I. In the three years that I spent at Columbia, borrowing more than sixty thousand dollars to get my degree, I was told repeatedly—by fellow-students, faculty, administrators, and professional writers whose careers I wished to emulate—not to think about the loans. Student loans, after all, were low-interest, long-term, and far more benign than credit-card debt. Not thinking about them was a skill that I quickly developed.

If there is in this story a single moment when I crossed the boundary between debtlessness and total financial mayhem, it's the first dollar that I put toward my life as a writer in New York—despite the fact that I was hanging out at the Cuban coffee shop and traipsing through the windblown trash of upper Broadway. The year I entered graduate school was the year I stopped making decisions that were appropriate for my situation and began making a rich person's decisions. Entering this particular graduate program was a rich person's decision. Remaining there when it became clear that I was not going to get any scholarship money, and that the class schedule would prevent me from holding down a day job, was also a rich person's decision.

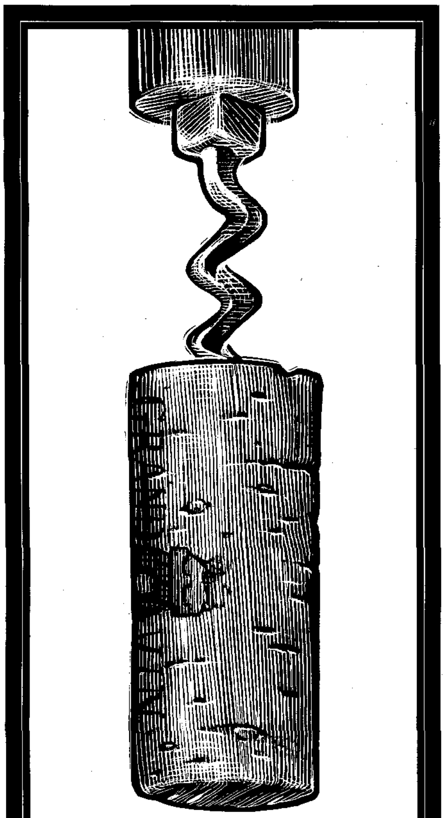
But it's hard to recognize that you're acting like a rich person when you're becoming increasingly poor. Besides, I was never without a job. I worked for an anthropology professor for nine dollars an hour. I read manuscripts at ten dollars a pop for an ersatz literary agent. I worked at a university press for ten dollars an hour. Sometimes I called in sick to these jobs and did temp work at midtown offices for seventeen dollars an hour. A couple of times, I took out cash advances on my credit cards to pay the rent. There was a period during a particularly miserable winter, in 1994, when I tried to make it through three weeks on thirty-four dollars, walking sixteen blocks to school in subzero temperatures and stealing my roommates' food, hoping they wouldn't notice. One day, I slipped on the ice three times, got in a cab, and decided to take out a private loan from Columbia for two thousand five hundred dollars. A thousand of it went to pay off part of a credit card. I used up the rest within a month.

There were a handful of us who were pulling stunts like this. One of my roommates had maxed out her credit cards in order to finance a student film. I knew several women, and even a few men, who were actively looking for rich marriage partners to bail them out. One aspiring novelist I know underwent a series of drug treatments and uncomfortable surgical procedures in order to sell her eggs for twenty-five hundred dollars. Whether or not one is paying twenty thousand dollars' tuition a year to try to make it as a writer, New York City in the nineties is a prohibitively expensive place to live for just about anyone. Although I devoted a lot of energy to being envious of Columbia classmates whose relatives were picking up the tab, it later became clear to me that the need for outside financial support is not limited to those in entry-level jobs or expensive graduate programs. These days, pursuing a career in the arts in New York is often contingent upon inheriting the means to do so.



As I was finishing at Columbia, however, I began to get some freelance work, so I continued to hedge my bets. I was publishing magazine articles regularly and, after a few months of temping at insurance companies and banks, scored some steady assignments that, to my delight, allowed me to work as a full-time freelance writer. After five years and eight different roommates in the 100th Street apartment, I was earning enough money to move into my own place. More important, I had found a two-year sublet in a rent-stabilized building, and the fact that I had done so through a Columbia connection seemed almost sufficient justification for the money I'd spent on grad school.

Things were going well. In 1997, I was twenty-seven, teaching a writing course at N.Y.U., publishing in a variety of magazines, and earning about fifty-five thousand dollars before taxes. (The teaching job paid only twenty-five hundred dollars for an entire semester, but I was too enamored of the idea of being a college instructor to wonder if I could



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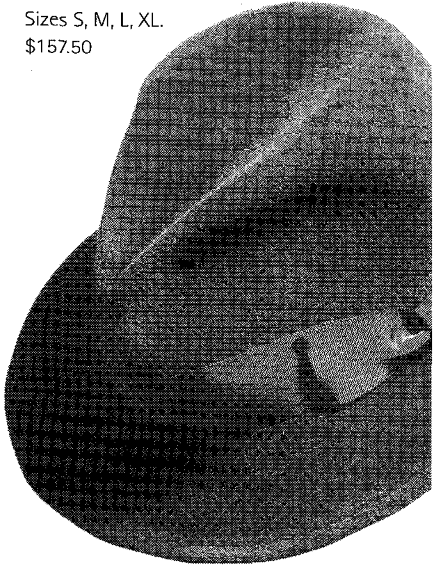

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afford to take it.) I had a decent-sized apartment with oak floors and porcelain hexagonal tiles that were coming loose in the bathroom. Like an honest New Yorker, I even had mice lurking in the kitchen. I bought rugs and a fax machine. I installed a second telephone line for the fax. Finally, I was leading the life I'd spent so long preparing for.

Then came the dental bills, which I was forced to charge to Visa. I tried not to think about that too much, until I ended up making a few doctor's visits that, because I was uninsured, I also charged to Visa. When April rolled around, I realized that my income was significantly higher that year than it had been in any previous year, and that I had woefully underestimated what I owed in taxes. Despite a profusion of the typical freelancer's writeoffs—movies, magazine subscriptions, an $89.99 sonic rodent-control device—I was hit with a bill of more than twenty thousand dollars. And although the I.R.S. apparently deemed sonic rodent-control devices an acceptable deduction, it seemed that I'd earned too much money to be eligible to write off the nearly seven thousand dollars (most of it interest) I'd paid to the student-loan agency or the three thousand dollars in dental bills. In the months it took me to assemble that twenty thousand dollars, I had to reduce my student-loan payments from the suggested eight hundred dollars to the aforementioned $448.83 a month. Most heartbreaking of all, my accountant determined that my sixty-dollar pledge to WNYC—my Upper West Side tableau couldn't possibly be complete without the National Public Radio coffee mug—was not entirely tax deductible.

It was around this time that I started having trouble thinking about anything other than how to make a payment on whatever bill was sitting on my desk, most likely weeks overdue, at any given time. I began getting final disconnection notices from the phone company, letters from the gas company asking "Have you forgotten us?," collection calls from Visa. A friend who had been a member of Debtors Anonymous urged me to put a note over my phone that read, "Owing money does not make me a bad person." I didn't do this, partly because it wouldn't have fit in with the décor of my apartment, and

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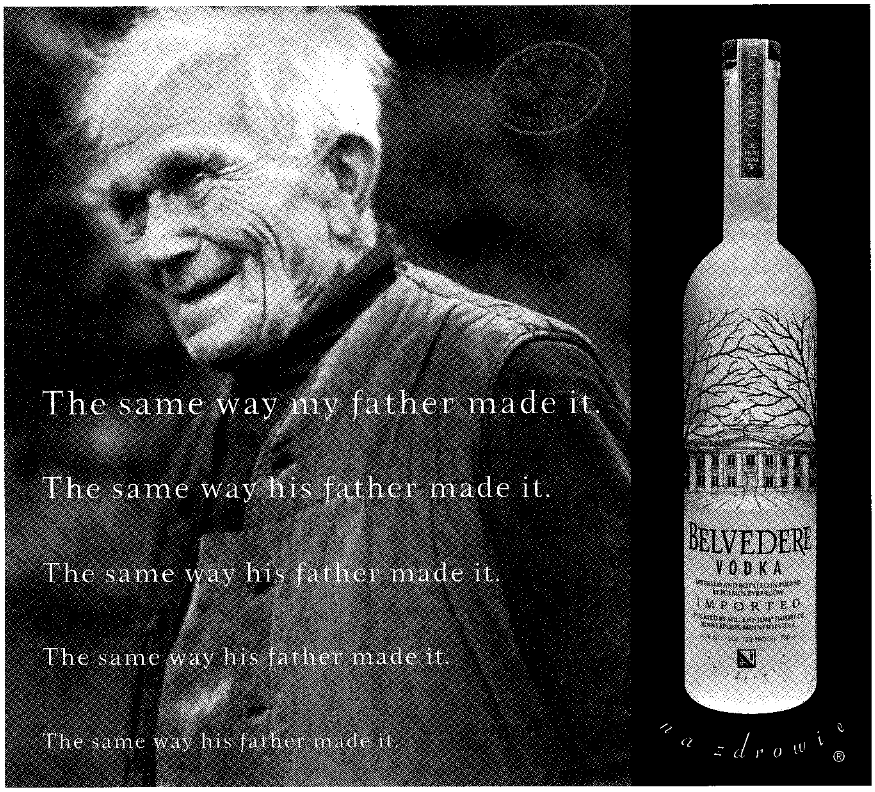
partly because I wasn't sure she was right. She did, however, persuade me to call Visa and put a hold on my account for six months, which would reduce my payments to a hundred and five dollars a month and freeze the interest. This required telling the customer-service representative at Visa that I was experiencing some financial "hardships." When she asked me to be more specific, I told her that I had medical expenses, and hung up the phone feeling as if I had a terminal illness.

I noticed that I was drinking more than I had in the past, often alone at home, where I would sip Sauvignon Blanc at my desk and pretend to write when in fact I'd be working out some kind of desperate math equation on the tool-bar calculator, making wild guesses as to when I'd receive some random eight-hundred-dollar check from some unreliable accounting department of some slow-paying publication, how long it would take the check to clear, what would be left after I set aside a third of it for taxes, and, finally, which lucky creditor would be the recipient of what remained. There's nothing like completing one of these calculations, realizing that you've drunk half a bottle of $7.99 wine, and feeling guiltier about having spent $7.99 than about being too tipsy to work. One night, I did a whole bunch of calculations and discovered that, despite having earned a gross income of seventy-eight thousand dollars in 1998, despite having not gone overboard on such classic debtor's paraphernalia as clothes and vacations and stereo equipment, despite having followed the urban striver's guide to success, I was more than seventy-five thousand dollars in the hole.

There are days when my debt seems to be at the center of my being, a cancer that must be treated with the morphine of excuses and rationales and promises to myself that I'm going to come up with the big score—book advance, screenplay deal, Publishers Clearinghouse prize—and save myself. There are other days when the debt feels like someone else's cancer, a tragedy outside myself, a condemned building next door that I try to avoid walking past. But the days when I can pretend that money is "only money" are growing farther and farther apart. I have friends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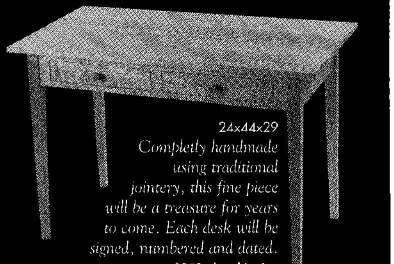

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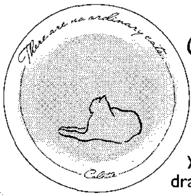

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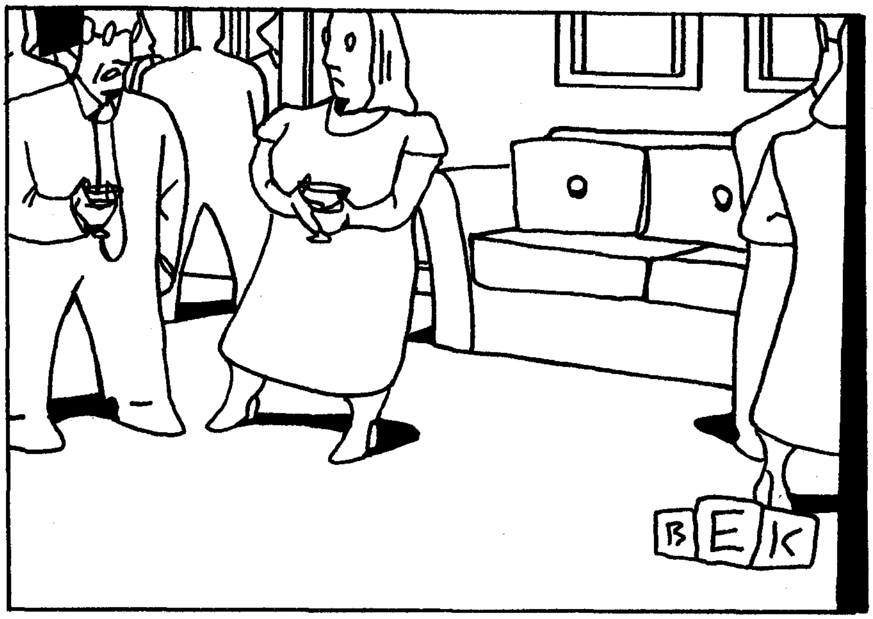
who are getting rich off the stock market and buying million-dollar houses. I have other friends who are almost as badly off as I am, and who compulsively volunteer for relief work in Third World countries as a way of forgetting that they can't quite afford to live in the First World.

But New York City, which has a way of making you feel like you're in the Third World just seconds after you thought you'd conquered all of Western civilization, has never really belonged to the rest of the country. I suppose that part of the city's magical beastliness is the fact that you can show up with the best of intentions, do what's considered to be all the right things, achieve some measure of success, and still find yourself trapped in a financial emergency.

As I write this, I have to be out of my sublet within months. Even if I try to assume control of the lease, the landlord will renovate the apartment and raise the rent to two thousand dollars. When I reported this calamity to a friend the other day, hoping she would gasp in sympathy, she instead replied, "That's cheaper than our place." A two-bedroom apartment down the street recently rented for forty-five hundred a month. A small studio on the Upper West Side will go for an average of twelve hundred and fifty dollars. West 104th Street is totally beyond my means. Worse, 104th Street is now beyond the means of most of the people who made me want to live here in the first place. The New York that changed my life on that summer night when I was seventeen no longer exists.

Several months ago, on a day when the debt anxiety had flared up even more than usual, I found myself fantasizing about moving to Lincoln, Nebraska. I'd been to Lincoln twice on a magazine assignment, met some nice people, and found myself liking it enough to entertain the notion of moving there. But both times I'd discarded the idea the minute the wheels hit the tarmac at LaGuardia. Surely I'd never be able to live without art-movie houses and twenty-four-hour takeout. During my last round of panic, however, I convinced myself that it was a good plan. I can rent an apartment there for three hundred dollars a month. I can rent an entire house, if I want one, for seven hundred dollars. Full-coverage health insurance will cost me seventy-five dollars a month. Apparently, people in Nebraska also listen to NPR, and there are even places to live in Lincoln that have oak floors. Had I known that before, I might have skipped out on this New York thing altogether and spared myself the financial and psychological ordeal. But I'm kind of glad I didn't know, because I've had a very, very good time here. I'm just leaving the party before the cops break it up. ♦



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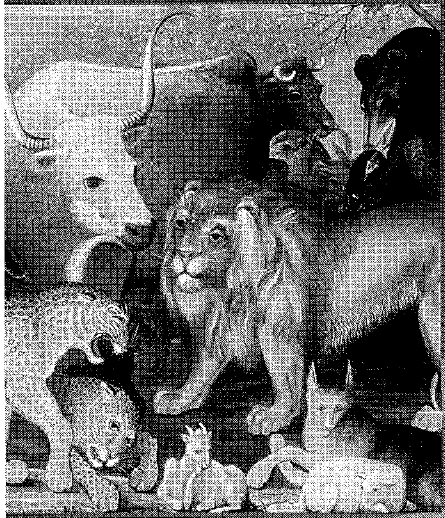

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Above left, top: Edward Hicks, *Peaceable Kingdom* (detail), 1844–46, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center; bottom: Joseph Richardson, *Teapot*, c. 1750–60, Philadelphia Museum of Art. Right: John H. Twachtman, *Mother and Child*, c. 1893, Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Jacob Stern Family Loan Collection.

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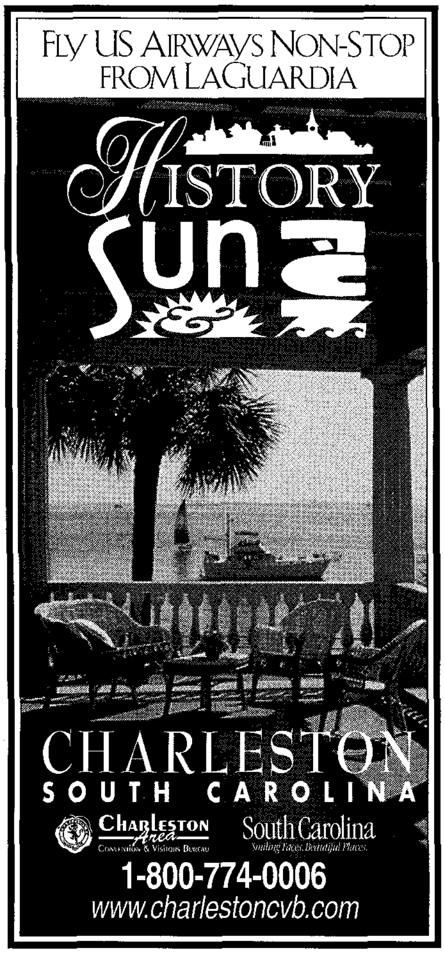
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PRODIGIOUS

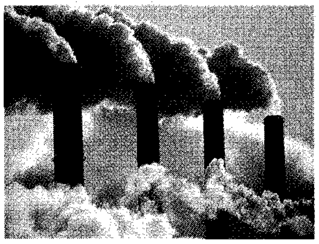
Would you give up your childhood to become a concert violinist?

BY DAVID DENBY

BARRON CLAIBORNE

At the Juilliard School a few weeks ago, a young violinist entered the studio of Dorothy DeLay, the school's preëminent teacher of virtuosos—her ex-students include Itzhak Perlman, Nigel Kennedy, Gil Shaham, Midori, and Sarah Chang—and unpacked her instrument, a three-quarter-size Rocca, dating from 1852. The student, Rachel Lee, a Korean-American born in Chicago, is about four feet seven inches tall. She was wearing a brown jumper with white and orange flowers printed on it, a white short-sleeved shirt, white socks, and white sandals. After greeting Miss DeLay, she nodded at the accompanist and, without hesitation, without excuses or ritual self-deprecation—without any of the stalling that most of us do when we have to perform something or even make a presentation at the office—launched into the first movement, marked adagio, of Bach's Sonata in E Major for violin and harpsichord. Planting her feet, Rachel swayed slightly as she played and kept her eyes downcast and her face expressionless. Her arms are not long enough to play a full-sized instrument, but even with her Rocca she produced a rich, perfectly centered tone; she also produced a boldly incisive shaping of Bach's long-limbed phrases, such that the music seemed to leap out at the listener. The performance was technically secure and almost disturbingly intense. Rachel is a child prodigy. She is eleven years old.

"Thank you, Rachel. I love what you do with that," Miss DeLay said, and then Rachel played the next piece she had prepared, a shortened version of the first movement of the Paganini Violin Concerto No. 1, a nineteenth-century bravura display complete with double-stopping, skittering sixteenth



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notes, and some honeyed melodies. "Very good," Miss DeLay said, "but I think the cadenza might sound better a little slower. That way, we can hear your fingers pop on every note." Rachel played it slower, so you could hear her articulate each note. Since she had played both pieces without music, I asked her how long it had taken her to memorize the Paganini. "Oh, a few days," she said. "Less than a week." She speaks in a soft voice—a tiny voice—with a slight but brilliant smile, and, after she says what she has to say, she remains silent.

When the lesson was over, I spoke to Dorothy DeLay, who was sitting at a desk with musical scores and a box of tissues and a teapot arrayed before her. DeLay, who is eighty-two, is a large person, majestic but informal, who wears black boots and has a full head of gray hair and beautiful eyes. She has been teaching violin at Juilliard since 1948, and her manner with Rachel, who clearly loves to play, is extremely benevolent. DeLay has led many such children through the difficulties of adolescence and sudden fame; she has also had students who have known disappointment and worse. "They have the capacities of an adult but the emotional development of a child," DeLay said of her young students. "I don't want them to feel that they are on trial, so they have to make their mothers feel good—that's death. The people who play well know this."

Nurturing a prodigy is a high-risk game, not only for the parents but perhaps even for a renowned teacher. The odds against success are disagreeable to contemplate: only one out of every two hundred or so Juilliard music students will go on to have a stellar solo career. Imagine, if you can, that your child wanted to be a lawyer and began to think that no matter how well she did in law school, no matter how many cases she tried and won, she would still be a failure if she was not appointed one of the nine justices of the Supreme Court. For a prodigy like Rachel, failure is defined in terms that would feel like success for many others—a career spent playing in a chamber ensemble or a great symphony orchestra. Ambition like hers can kill, and yet there is no way to become a great musician without training muscles and instincts from an early age. Everyone knows this about prodigies, and everyone deplores the pressures they live under. Having met a gifted young violinist, I wondered if the prize was worth all that she might suffer, now or in the future, to attain it.

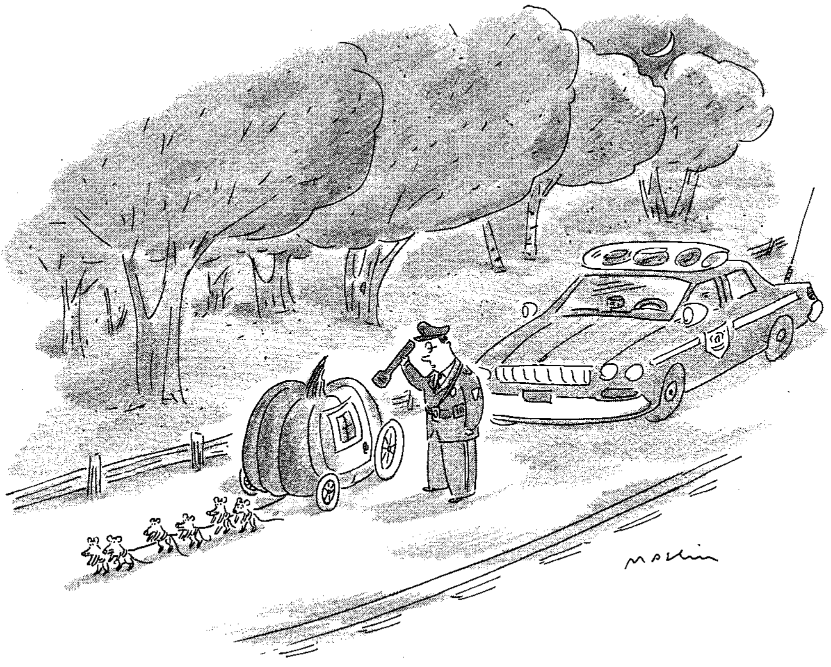
I asked DeLay if Rachel Lee had as much raw talent as, say, Midori, who is now a reigning international star. She looked at me squarely. "Oh, yes!" she said.

Rachel lives in Scarsdale, New York, with her mother and father and two brothers in a smallish, pleasant house built in the nineteen-twenties. The Lees have occupied the house for just over a year, and everything looks new, freshly painted, and exceptionally tidy. Rachel's room is upstairs, and faces the back; it has four windows looking out on trees, pale-green walls, and an astonishingly empty carpet (with a pang, I thought of my own children's impasto of clothes, CDs, and candy wrappers). On top of a cabinet sit a number of stuffed dolls, including a pink elephant and one of the oldest Beanie Babies—Bongo, which Rachel showed me proudly. A small Sony rack stereo system is lodged in the cabinet. Everything else is tucked away behind closed doors; the room is almost featureless except for a music stand positioned in the center. When Rachel plays, she faces out toward the trees.

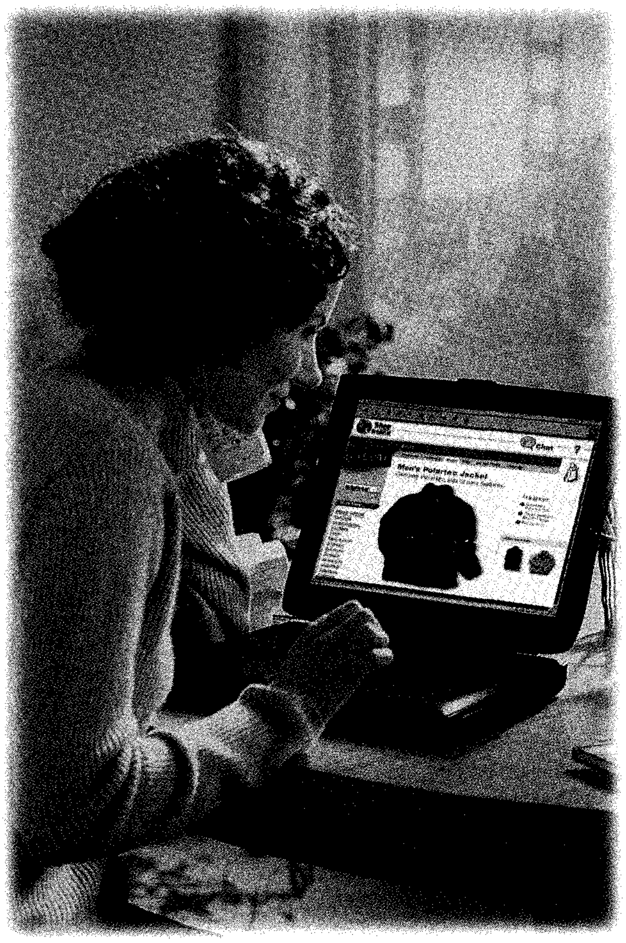
Rachel attends sixth grade at a private school in nearby Tarrytown; she practices the violin for four hours a day, and also does a full load of homework. Sitting on her bed, Rachel told me in her tiny voice that she watches television only occasionally and doesn't go to the movies much but reads when she can. Last summer, she read "The Diary of Anne Frank," composed by a girl imprisoned in a hidden life with her family, and "Where the Red Fern Grows," which is about a boy who worked for two years to get puppies. Rachel had a puppy of her own, Bonnie, a white Shih Tzu with blond spots, but the animal immediately developed serious kidney problems and had to be given up. Rachel hopes to get another puppy soon.

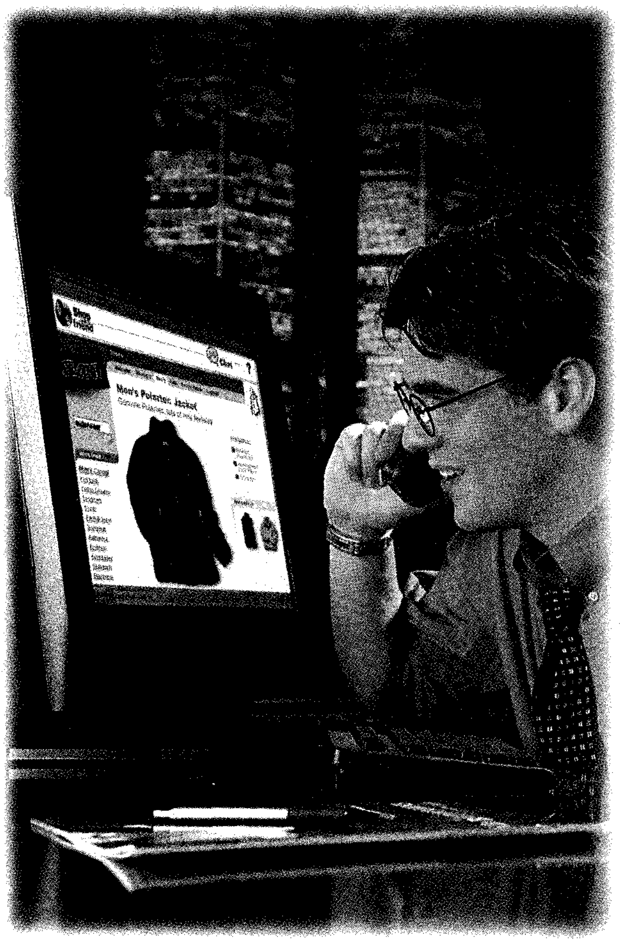
Rachel doesn't play music with her school friends—they can't possibly keep up with her. And when they invite her to come over and hang out, she tells them that she has to practice. "They don't think it's a very good excuse," she said. "They don't understand why I have to practice every day, why I can't stop for a day." She told me these things, in her room, without pleasure but without great regret, either—she's a very matter-of-fact genius. She insists that the only time she is bored with practicing is when the pieces become too easy.

Downstairs, her father, Tim Lee, a software engineer for Merrill Lynch, who is forty-six, sat on a couch, while her mother, Caron, who is forty-one, knelt on the floor beside a coffee table. The Lees, searching for a better education than what was available at home, emi-



"Would you mind stepping out of the pumpkin, please?"





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grated with their families from South Korea in the early eighties. They met in Chicago, married, and started a family, and in 1996 moved to the New York area so that Rachel, who is the second of their three children, could study with Miss DeLay at Juilliard. Tim Lee doesn't play an instrument himself, but his sisters do (one of them is a Juilliard graduate), and Caron plays the piano and accompanies Rachel during practice. Caron could be called, I suppose, a violin mom, if that phrase is understood to encompass spiritual, moral, and musical guidance as well as chauffeuring. When I asked Caron Lee about the rigors of Rachel's life, and what Rachel might be missing, she said, "The school had a camping trip, and she couldn't go. She cared, but it wasn't possible." What about hanging out with her friends? "Birthday parties at other people's houses are O.K. two or three times a month," she said. "E-mail or Internet, thirty minutes a night is O.K., but only if she does her practicing."

A violin mom! She smiled at me from the floor. She knew what I was thinking. "I keep pushing her," she said. "She can play any sound. She's very quick. If she plays fifteen pages of music three or four times through, she memorizes it, and she has a sense of how things should go. Her potential is unlimited."

EVERY Saturday, Rachel comes into the city and spends most of the day at Juilliard, where she attends the pre-college program with other young musicians. On a recent Saturday, Rachel, in her theory class, stood at the board writing out scales with a gentle hand, drawing the notes rather faintly. Later, in ear-training, or solfège, class, she sang the intervals that the teacher played on the piano in a soft voice that could barely be heard across the room. Like her quiet comments to me in her bedroom, her hushed performance in class makes a remarkable contrast to her playing, which is anything but timid. A few years ago, Dorothy DeLay lost patience with a group of Asian-American female students—their playing was correct but nerveless—and called in a sports psychologist to give the students assertiveness training. Despite Rachel's demure manners, no sports psychologist will be necessary.

Where does the force that I heard in the Bach come from? In the extrava-

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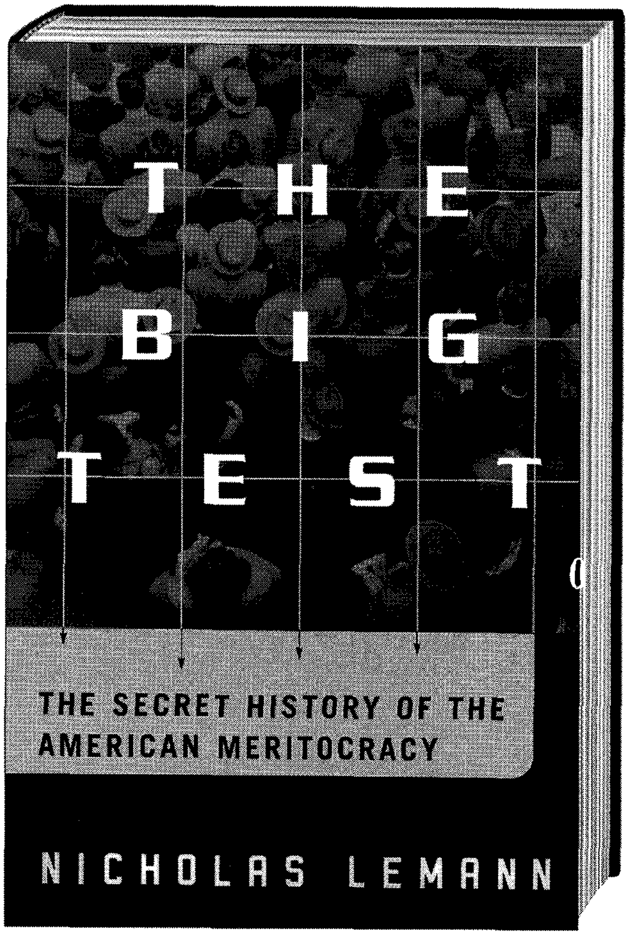

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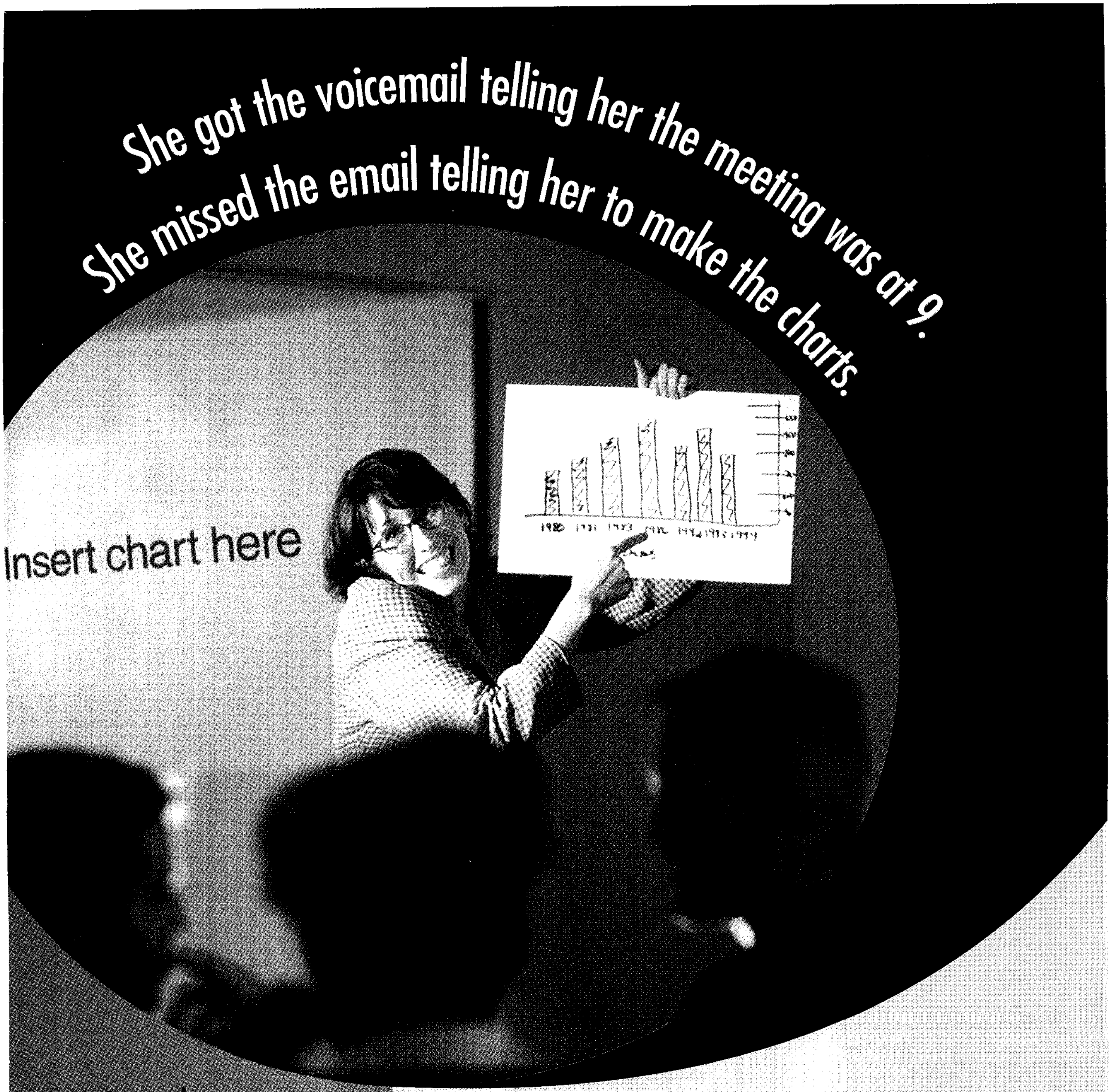
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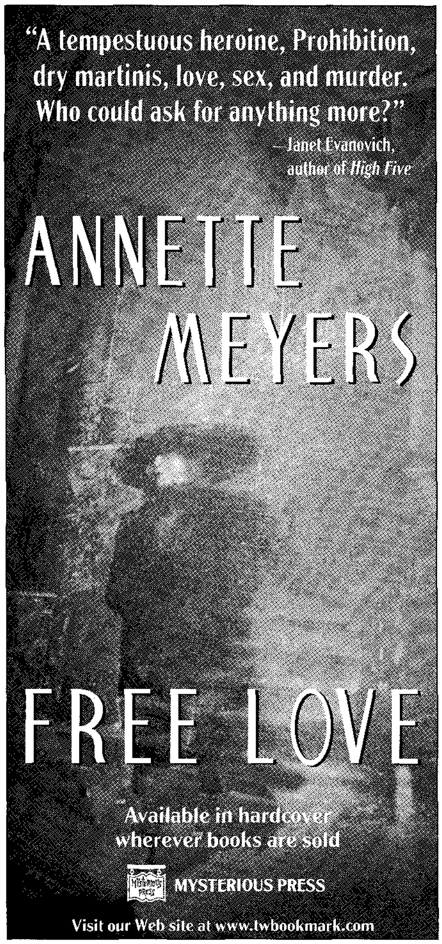
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gant mythology of the violin, seductive, even demonic qualities are associated with the instrument: the violin has the power to enchant, and the great virtuoso is a cross between mesmerist and aphrodisiast. How ironic, then, that some of the dominant new players are polite and self-contained Asian-American girls raised in the strictest discipline—children of immigrants, many of them, like the Jewish violinists of Russian descent in earlier decades. They come from families that place a high spiritual value on art and a strong emphasis on methodical study, families that in many cases are eager to assimilate into American life and discover that their talented children can quickly make their mark through music. The cultural paradoxes are startling: Asians are now playing European music superlatively well in a media-mad American society that increasingly cares more for superstar performers than for the music itself. The Asian-American violinist has recently become a hot media property.

"It's fun, going onstage and performing," Rachel told me. "I was nervous about it before, but now I'm nervous less and less, and I can enjoy it more." In the quiet little girl, there is an iron will, a world-conquering determination nurtured by family and teachers. Around that will, a kind of shell forms—the institutional and cultural world of classical music—which fends off the noise and pleasurable triviality of American life. Despite the deprivations she undergoes, Rachel, living within the shell, gives the impression of being happy.

JUILLIARD has been criticized, even from within the school, as a factory for turning out note-perfect players who lack a deep musical culture. But how much can a musician know at eight or ten or eleven? One very young Asian-American virtuoso was confronted with Leonard Bernstein, whose "Serenade" has a great solo-violin part. Bernstein, looming over the violinist, told her that the "Serenade" was based on Plato's Symposium, a dialogue about the nature of love. "Love?" said the tiny girl, with uplifted face. Another very young violinist, rehearsing a piece of mock-Gypsy romantic kitsch from the nineteenth century, was asked what she knew about Gypsies. "They don't have jobs?" she said.

Rachel's teachers struggle with the problem of teaching her about musical style without killing the unselfconscious power that gives such vitality to her playing. At Juilliard, after her solfège and theory classes, Rachel works with another violin teacher, Won-Bin Yim, who recently listened to Rachel play the same Bach piece—and with the same rich, throbbing tone—that I had heard her play for DeLay. "Rachel, do you know what kind of room the Bach was played in originally?" Yim asked her. "Maybe a dancing place?" she said. It was not quite the answer he was looking for—a prince's palace or a music room might have been a better one—but he was determined, however gently, to get his point across. "Rachel, you are not in Avery Fisher Hall in front of two thousand people."

Yes, but inside her head, I thought, that is exactly where she is, and wants to be, and it's perhaps that ambition which makes her playing so exciting, even if it's not in the correct period style. Her teachers probably know this better than anyone. A few days later, during a lesson with Dorothy DeLay, Rachel played a Mozart concerto with too much rubato, and DeLay, beating her pencil on a table, marched her through the piece in strict tempo. But afterward DeLay said to me, "I don't want to make too many demands. As soon as I do that, the sound becomes artificial."

RACHEL asked for a violin when she was four, and, at the end of her first lesson, her teacher, in Chicago, telephoned Caron Lee and said, "I think your daughter is very gifted." A year later, when she was in kindergarten, she wrote in her journal, "I want to be a violinist." Her technique is very sound, but in that Mozart lesson with DeLay, at Miss DeLay's house, north of the city, Rachel received some instruction in fundamentals—an alteration of the curl of the fingers on the bow hand for greater control of the bow and also a way of relaxing the fingers when she doesn't need them for pressure, so the hand doesn't get clenched or cramped. As DeLay instructed, Rachel

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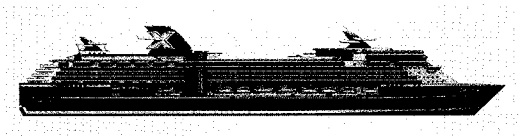

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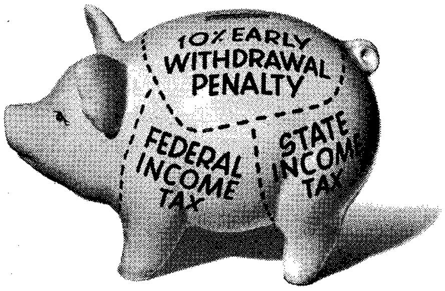

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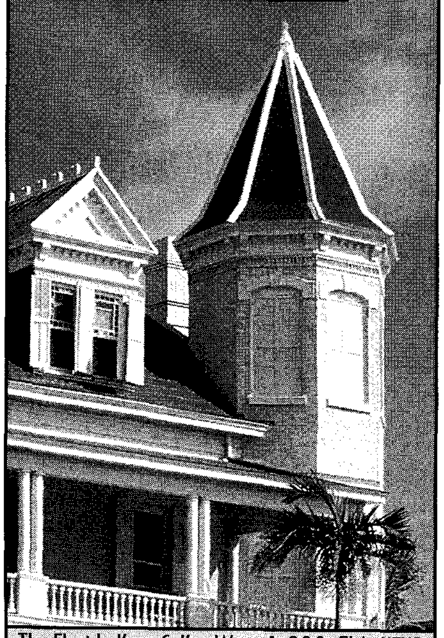

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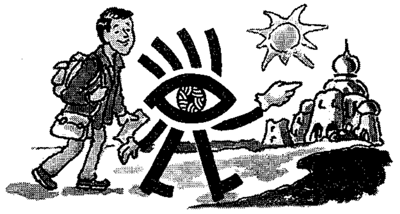

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did not argue or ask questions. She played, first in one tempo and then another, with more and then less vibrato, more and then less rubato. She gathers the elements of her temperament and puts them into the music. "I don't know exactly where the emotion comes from," she wrote me in an E-mail. "If I sense that the music is supposed to be mad or sad, I can feel it in the music and I try to make it mad or sad." She seems, in other words, to be able to make whatever sound with that bow that she wants to make.

After the lesson, DeLay held forth on Rachel's future and the dilemmas of being a prodigy. "Up to the age of eleven," she said, "all we have to do is to keep mommy happy, and the world is nice. And I don't mean any criticism of Caron, who's a wonderful person. But around twelve they realize, Someday I'm gonna be a grownup, and I have to do everything myself. It's a kind of second birth. The parents can get anxious, or even guilty, and sometimes it falls apart.

"I would like for Rachel not to start a solo career too early. A few concerts, but not eight a month"—and here she mentioned a famous young virtuoso who was burning the bow at both ends. "The kids start so early these days, and they worry too much about accuracy and lose the imaginative things. Rachel has a great ear, she has a beautiful musical intelligence and a feeling for the musical line. If she doesn't hit any anxiety that takes her away from the enjoyment of the music, she'll go on to develop."

So far, the enjoyment seems real, not forced. Rachel may be enclosed in a little world, but she is not suffering—at least, not now. Instinctively, one wants to protect so brilliant a child against the possibility of failure without undermining her ambition or her defiantly unfashionable virtue. In the end, her love of music, as much as her talent, may insure her survival. That love may be her spear, her shield, her parachute, her solace—everything she needs, whether she becomes a great success or not. But can a prodigy know that in a media age? I thought back to Rachel in her room, sitting on her bed: When I asked how she would feel if she had to accept a lesser role in music than that of star soloist, she replied, "I don't think about that, because I don't want that to happen." ♦

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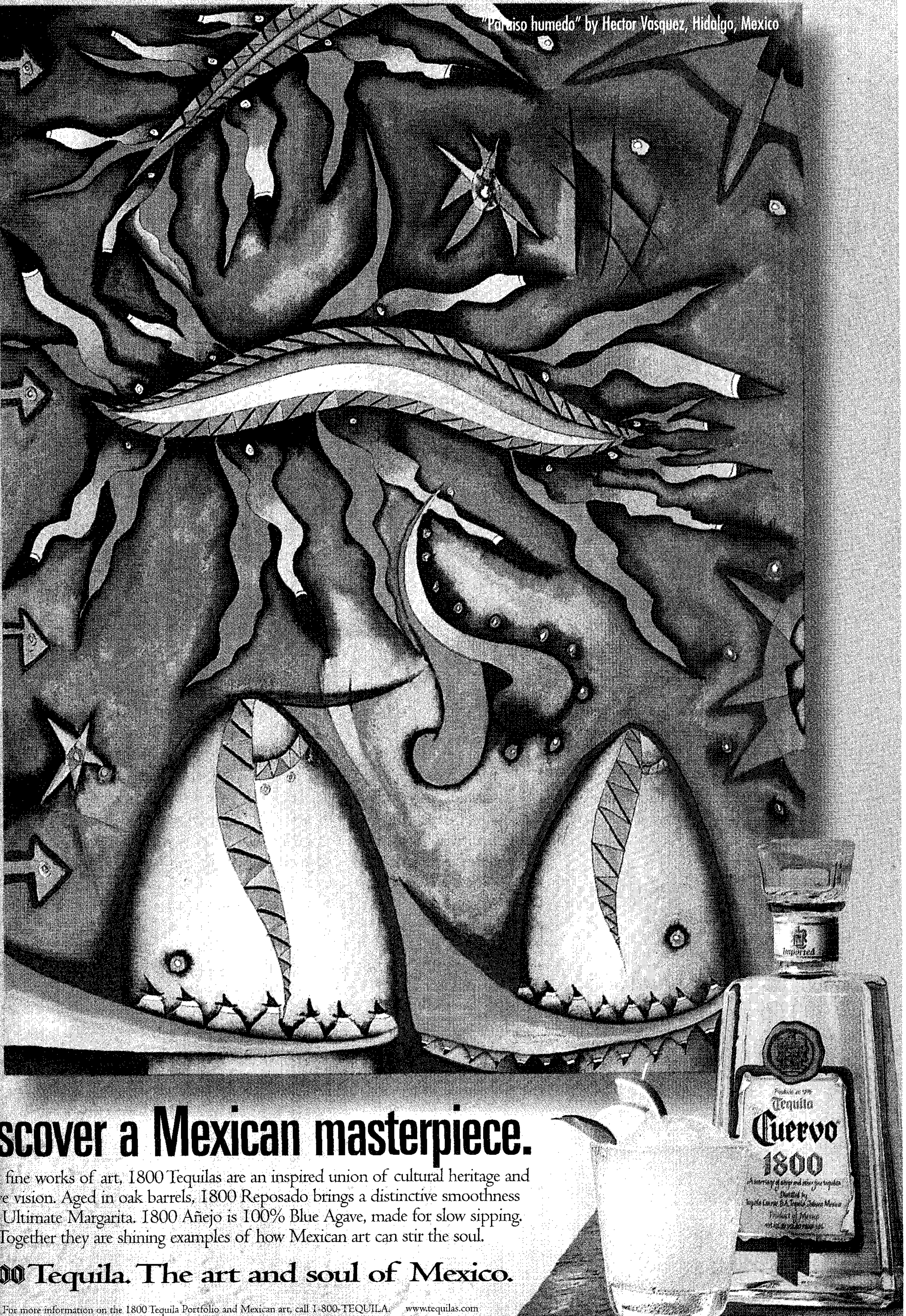

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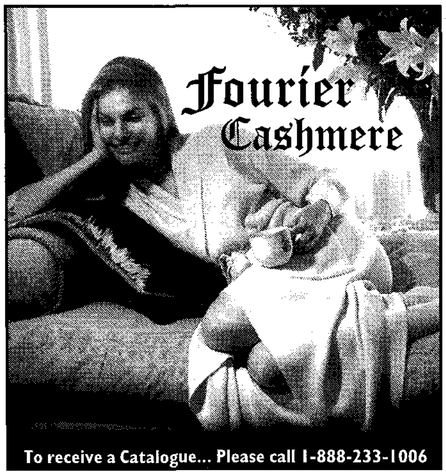

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"I REALLY don't think anyone should write a first novel at my age," says the English writer Zadie Smith, who, at twenty-three, has had the nerve to ignore her misgivings and produce a "big, baggy" novel entitled "White Teeth." (The book will be published here next May.) But even if you ignore the notice her work has already generated—a hefty two-book deal, an advance rave from Salman Rushdie, who calls "White Teeth" an "astonishingly assured début"—and try to read it with an open mind, you soon become aware of her exceptional talent. For one thing, Smith breaks the iron rule that first fictions should be thin slices of autobiography, served dripping with self-pity. "White Teeth," a gentle satire of migration and cultural identity, concerns, among other matters, Nazi eugenics programs, the eschatology of Jehovah's Witnesses, the DNA of mice, and a militant group called Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation, or KEVIN. Smith writes like an old hand, and, sometimes, like a dream.

While working on the novel, Smith didn't think it was autobiographical at all, but she can now see quite clearly how ghosts from her own life came creeping in through the back door. The character closest to the author's own experience seems to be Irie Jones, an engagingly earnest teen-ager who, like her creator, has a Jamaican mother and an older English father. Unlike Irie, Smith is the daughter of a fashion model turned social worker and a photographer. Smith studied English literature at King's College, Cambridge, drawn there by its romantic associations with the likes of E. M. Forster. She began working on "White Teeth" in her final year, after an editor read one of her short stories in a student publication and asked if she had a novel in the pipeline. "So I lied, and said yes," Smith says. —KEVIN JACKSON

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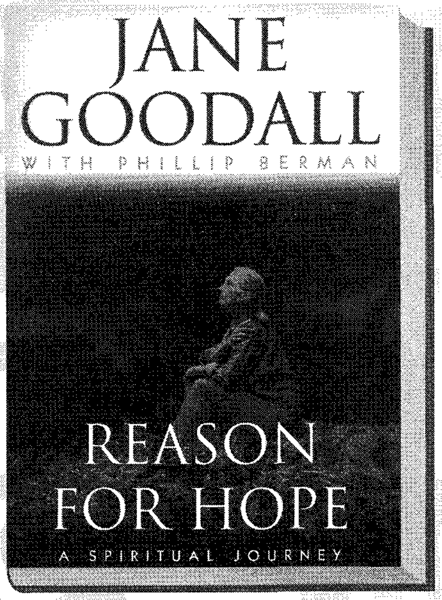

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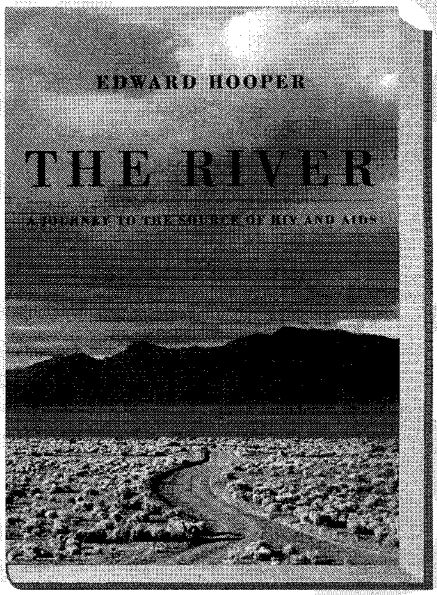

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BY REBECCA MEAD

If you've ever walked along Sixty-sixth Street on the Upper West Side, you will be familiar with its landmarks: there's the gargantuan Barnes & Noble on the eastern side of Broadway, and the Tower Records across the street, on the western side; and then a row of hulking, nondescript buildings heading west toward the river. But you might have missed some of the street's other highlights, several of which were recently pointed out to me during a tour of the neighborhood conducted by Sophie Glaser, her sister, Ariel, and Sophie's friend Katrina. For a start, there's the Skeleton Sleeping Spot: a darkened, pleasantly air-conditioned freight entrance just west of Broadway, which houses, incongruously, a life-size model of a skeleton dangling from the ceiling. A little farther up the block, there is the National Cockroach Spot, so called because Sophie and her friends once saw what she categorizes as a "humongous" cockroach sauntering by on that particular patch of sidewalk. Across the street, on the corner of West End and West Sixty-sixth, you've got the High Garbage Can Spot, named for the trash receptacle fixed halfway up a metal post.

If you go to check out the High Garbage Can Spot the next time you're in the neighborhood, you'll probably come to the conclusion that the garbage can in question isn't so high—its brim is less than five feet above the ground. But it would seem high to you if you were only four feet six inches tall and had just entered third grade, as Sophie has. Sophie is eight and a half years old, although I have on occasion heard her refer to herself as nine, and I have also heard Ariel, who is five, sharply correct her by saying, "You're *eight,* Sophie." (Sophie's name, and those of her family and her friends, have been changed in this article.) She lives in a modest two-bedroom apartment in a postwar building not far from Lincoln Center, with her father, Scott, who is a partner in a large law firm, and her mother, Anne, who works for one of the major cable networks, editing promotional spots for upcoming movies and specials. (Sophie on her mother's career: "My mommy has a great job because she gets to watch movies all day.") Like grownup Manhattanites, Sophie has a busy, Filofaxed life, with back-to-back appointments and obligations. She attends a co-educational private school on the Upper West Side; then, four evenings a week after school, she takes gymnastics. On Saturdays, she has ballet and tap lessons; and she participates in a weekend soccer league. Although she sometimes yawns her way through the second hour of dance, and starts to bicker with her sister a bit more than usual at around 7 P.M., Sophie hardly ever slows down. Even when she is standing around doing nothing, she doesn't just stand around doing nothing: all of a sudden she'll bring her left leg up to ear level, just for the hell of it, or throw herself into a cartwheel or a handstand, which can be a little disconcerting when, say, you are waiting with her for the elevator at Toys "R" Us.

Sophie—who is tall for her age, and very pretty, with shoulder-length blond hair and blue eyes and the kind of lean, upright physique that all the Pilates classes in the world couldn't buy—is satisfied with her busy life. That's not to say she thinks it couldn't be improved. One day, I asked her what she would change about the world, given the chance, and she sighed and said, "That people could never die, that there were no bad people in the world, that everybody had food, and that there were no wars, and everybody had a home, and clothes, and everybody was healthy, and the city wasn't so dirty. Stuff like that." She paused, thoughtfully, and added, "Then there are the wishes that I would like. Those are to be able to do any gymnastics trick in the world. To get a doggie that never dies. And, like, if you could pick an age and you could stay that way."

When I asked what age she would pick, she said, "Maybe thirteen, so I could see PG-13 movies." Teen-agers, she explained, "get to stay out as late as they want, they never have to go to bed, they have their own TV and phone in their room, and they don't really have to share a room. And teen-agers partly get to make their own decisions. I sometimes get to make my own decisions, but not very often. And so that is what I would like to change." She looked momentarily downcast. "But it is not going to change," she said.

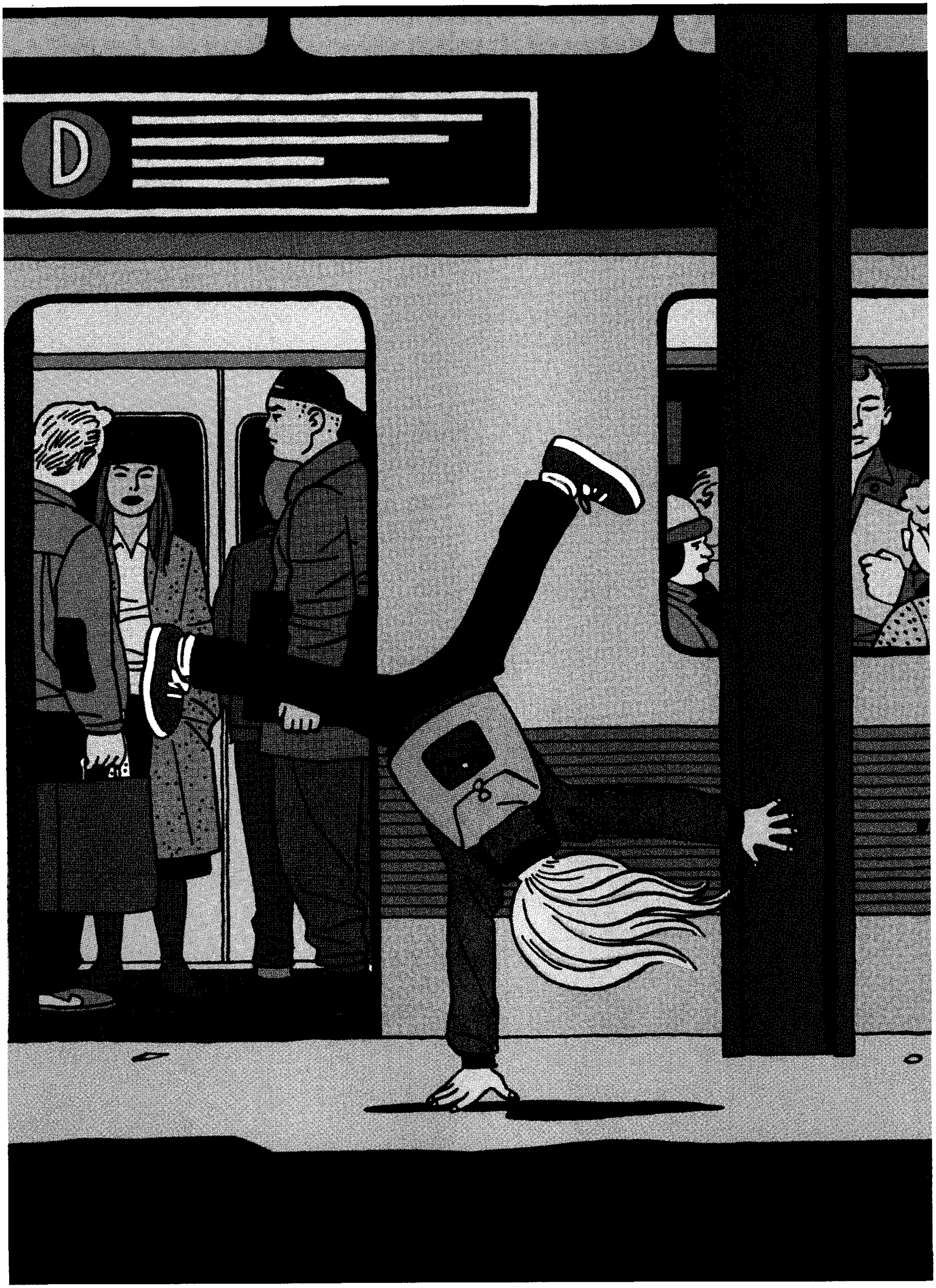
In a typically useless adult move, I reminded her that it would change, when she got older.

"But not *now,*" she said. "And that is the problem."

New Yorkers all live on top of one another, and Sophie and Ariel do so more than most: they share a bedroom, and every morning Ariel's bed, a trundle, is rolled away underneath Sophie's, which leaves the girls just enough floor space to be able to play one of the board games—Chutes and Ladders, Scrabble Junior—that they keep in their closet, along with a bright array of dress-up clothes. The tightness of space has endowed Sophie and Ariel with a precocious sense of the importance of real estate. One day when I was in their room with them, Ariel solemnly told me, "This was Sophie's room before I was born, so it's still really Sophie's room."

The rest of the apartment, which is laid out with the charmless, space-saving contours typical of postwar high-rises, provides equally close quarters: the front door opens directly into an L-shaped living-dining room—a glass-fronted wall

JAIME HERNANDEZ



"My grandma and grandpa always say, 'You need to know what is going on.' But I don't want to know what is going on," Sophie says.

unit in the dining area houses Sophie's many trophies for soccer and gymnastics—and a semi-enclosed kitchen is jammed into the space left over by the L. The living room sometimes serves as an arena for Sophie and Ariel to practice dancing or gymnastics, and they will often cartwheel across the rug, coming perilously close to a side table or a bookcase. Unlike the families of many of Sophie's friends, the Glasers don't have a house in the country, but they sometimes get out of the city on summer weekends when they go to Amagansett, where Sophie's paternal grandparents have a summer home. Sophie and her sister see a lot of their grandparents, whose only other grandchild, the daughter of Scott Glaser's late brother—he died in a skiing accident almost seven years ago—lives in Los Angeles.

There is no room for wasted space in Sophie's cramped apartment or in Sophie's busy life, though there is inevitably messiness in both. Early one Friday morning, before school, I was at the Glaser home just as the first skirmish of the day was taking place.

"Sophie, is it your turn to do pillows or animals?" Sophie's mother called sharply from her bedroom as she was arranging her hair for a day at the office.

"I'm doing pillows, Ariel's doing animals," Sophie yelled from the kitchen, where she was dawdling, opening her mail—an invitation to a birthday party to be held at Katz's Delicatessen.

"No, *Sophie* is doing animals. I already *did* pillows," wailed Ariel, who was sitting on the couch in the living room, tying the laces of new pink canvas sneakers.

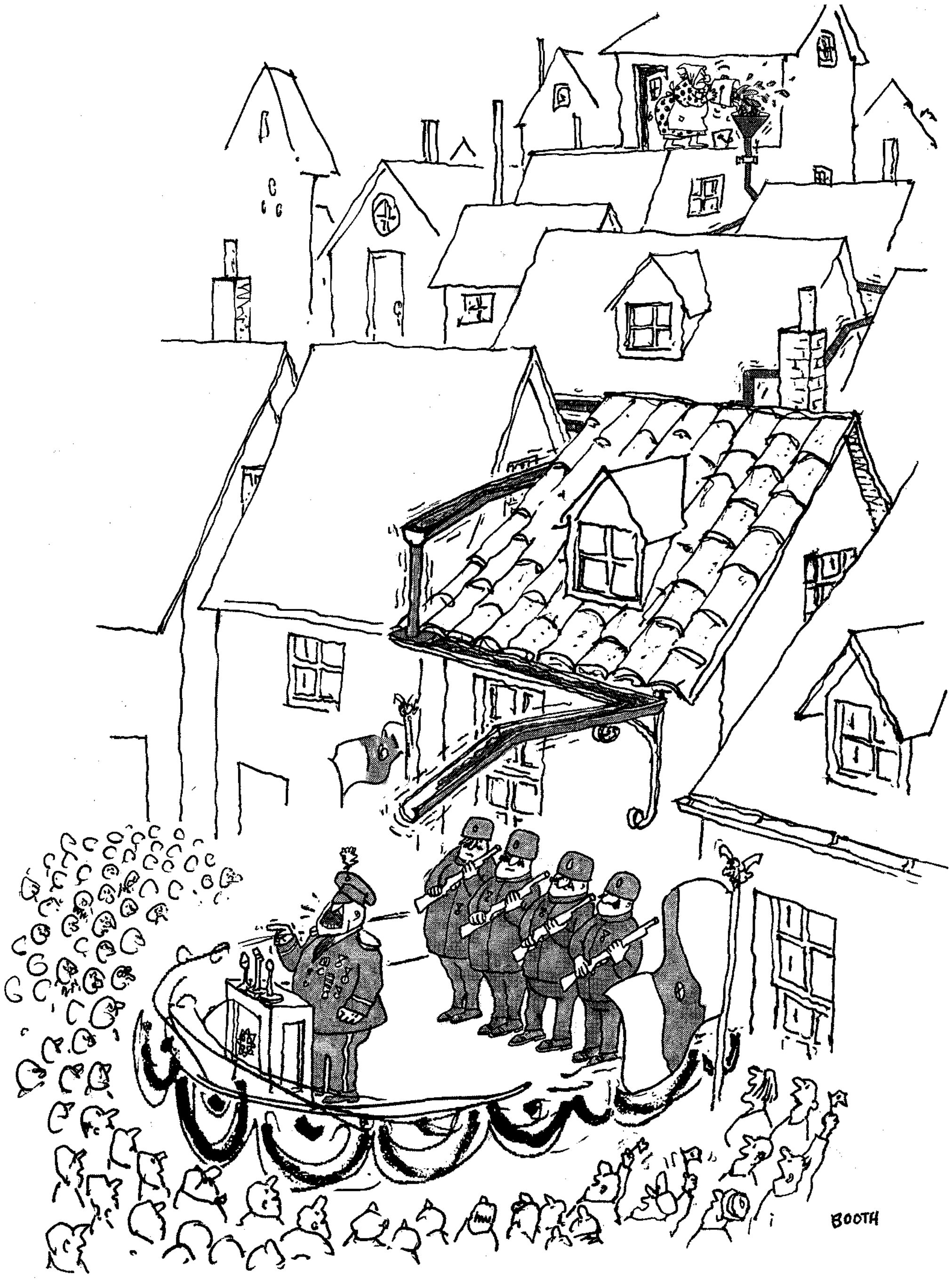
"Sophie, come and do the animals," Mrs. Glaser ordered.

"But I did animals *last* week! It's Ariel's turn to do animals!" Sophie cried.

And on it went, until finally Sophie stomped off to her bedroom.

The room, painted in pastel yellow, contained two dressers, two bookcases, a computer and a boom box, and shelves stacked with the essentials of contemporary girlhood: dolls and jewelry boxes and framed photographs and a Barbie in a W.N.B.A. outfit and a cannister of athlete's-foot powder. Against one wall was an iron-framed daybed, upon which a stack of pillows and cushions had been arrayed. The floor of the room was littered with plush toys.

Sophie flung herself against the mattress, slid down to the floor, and scooped up an armful of stuffed animals. "I wish I was still in bed," she sighed, as she arranged the toys in their customary positions on the bedspread, as either she or her sister is required to do every morning. When she got to a large brown dog whose neck, because of the migration of stuffing, flopped alarmingly, she cradled it and said, "This is my favorite, Big Puppy." She picked up a Teddy bear, and said, "This one is Ariel's," and gave it a punch on the nose. "And this one," she added, picking up another toy and punching it. "And this one." (Punch.) "And this one." (Kick to the corner of the room.)



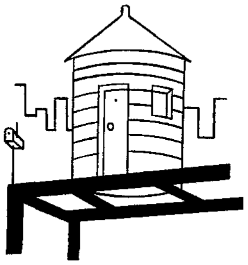
It was the first week of school for Sophie, and she was happy to be back, not least because it gave her a chance to enjoy the exclusive company of her peers. When we were first getting to know each other, she had told me, "If you have littler siblings, you can't wait to get to school, because you are not *next* to them, and you don't have to *be* with them." The problem of siblings is a much discussed topic among Sophie and her friends. "You feel so lucky for the people without siblings," she said. "A lot of the time, when you are the older one, you get the blame for everything. People say, 'Oh well, your brother or your sister is younger, so they don't know better.' And you are, like, 'You are going to say that for the rest of my life, right?' "

Sophie's school-day routine requires her to rise at seven-thirty, brush her hair, and get dressed in the clothes that she picked out the previous night: today, a pair of black bootleg pants with a cargo pocket on the side, in which she kept a row of Pentel Milky pens—markers with inks in pale-pastel colors, which are all the rage at her school—a ribbed black zip-up sweater with a fake-fur collar, and a pair of white sneakers with a slightly elevated platform sole. In Sophie's class, she explained, there are "girly" girls and "sporty" girls, and she falls into the latter category. Recently, she crossed the footwear Rubicon and acquired her first pair of shoes from the women's department: black leather oxfords with a two-inch heel.

Sophie sat at the dining table with Ariel and ate her breakfast, a bowl of Team Cheerios. As she ate she discussed the Harry Potter books—she is reading the second volume aloud in the evenings with her mother—and simultaneously demonstrated her ability to roll her eyes back in her head and to roll her tongue into three ridges, a newly acquired skill. Ariel did the same, with slightly less competence but no less enthusiasm.

After breakfast, the girls went and brushed their teeth (which for them is still a chore rather than a refreshing way of sloughing off the effects of too much garlic and red wine), and packed their pencil cases and water bottles into their backpacks. Sophie's father, who heads for the Reebok gym at six-thirty every morning for a ninety-minute workout, was not around. So when, at eight-fifteen, the girls left for school with their mother, the apartment emptied of everyone but the ancient, unpettable family cat, Gretchen, who had stalked the Glaser home all morning with pricked ears, climbing from sofa back to chair to tabletop, watching with alarm as the girls, two fair-haired cataclysms, charged around, their whirling limbs and escalating voices inhabiting the rooms in a way that, it appeared, Gretchen would never get used to.

If you drew a map of Sophie's universe, it would have something of the character of a medieval map of the world, with the Holy Land shown in detail in the center and monsters in the uncharted margins. The Upper West Side would loom very large, with locations given for home, school, the dance academy where she takes her lessons, her favorite Ray Bari Pizza parlor, and—a recent addition—the grownup shoe store on Columbus Avenue, near the Reebok gym. There would be a panhandle of territory tracing the path of the Broadway-Seventh Avenue I.R.T., extending down through the Times Square area, near where her mom works, and reaching Twenty-third Street, where it would dogleg off to the west, to indicate the location of Chelsea Piers, the site of her gymnastics classes. Other bits of the city would be remote and indistinct: SoHo, which Sophie visited once for a friend's birthday party, would be down at the bottom of the map somewhere. The Bronx Zoo, to which Sophie and Ariel are taken by their grandparents, who live in Dobbs Ferry, would be an island of familiar terrain set in the otherwise obscure northern territories. The Children's Museum and the Museum of Natural History, other grandparental destinations, would be drawn in, although Sophie wouldn't really mind if those locations were erased from the map.



One clearly marked route on the map would be the walk that Sophie, her mother, and her sister take each day to school. Sophie's school is the kind of place that is filled, at 8:45 A.M., with working mothers dashing through the marble hallways carrying Barbie backpacks, and with business-suited fathers sitting on the floor of the kindergarten classroom, putting in a quarter of an hour with the building blocks before heading to the office. (It is also filled, at pickup time in the afternoon, with caregivers from the Caribbean, collecting their young charges; Valerie, the Glasers' babysitter, is one of them.) The school is within walking distance of home, and Mrs. Glaser drops the girls off there each morning before going to her office. When Sophie gets to her classroom, she slips away from her mom as if she were politely but decisively evading an overbearing guest at a cocktail party, and darts in to join her classmates.

Sophie likes school, and her favorite subjects are math, science, spelling, and social studies. She tried her hand at fiction last year, writing a story entitled "Things from Mars Coming to Class 2," which concerned a visitation from an alien, Chubby Wubby, who had a predilection for hamburgers. "Chubby Wubby comes to our class, and he is telling everybody about himself, and his favorite hobby is the disco—I like that part," she explained. "And what happens at the end is he is on his spaceship, and somebody is shaking me, and I wake up, and it is my mommy. It was all a really cool dream."

During recess, Sophie and her friends hang out and chat, swapping Milky pens; when they are taken to Central Park, they might play tag or hide-and-seek, or practice gymnastics tricks. Sophie's best friend at school is a girl named Margo, but she has other friends, too, including some boys. Sophie and her friends have just about reached the age where they have started to talk among themselves about "liking" boys. She has no patience for girls who say that it is "disgusting" to like boys, but who do so all the same. "Sometimes people ask them if they like anybody, and they say no," she says. "And I will look at them, like, 'Yeah, *right*.' "

The social structure of a third-grade class is a little like that of an eighteenth-century royal court: there may be politesse, but there is also, barely concealed, intrigue and alliance and devastating ostracism. Researchers of middle childhood—the preferred term for what Freud called the latency period, the elementary-school years—describe a culture of "niceness" into which upper-middle-class girls are typically inducted. (Among working-class girls, characteristics like toughness and ruthlessness are more likely to be valued.) Sophie and her friends participate in such niceness: they know that they aren't supposed to malign other children, and that they ought to conduct their social relationships smoothly. But that's just the surface. Listening to little girls talk about their friendships is like reading *Soap Opera Digest*, where relations are roiled with tawdry drama. One of Sophie's school friends, Helen, gave me a tutorial on the incredibly intricate knot of her own closest friendships: Helen's best friend is named Erica, but another girl, named Meghan, thinks Erica is *her* best friend, and makes a fuss when Helen and Erica spend time together; meanwhile, Erica doesn't get along at all with Helen's oldest friend, Julia, so when Helen is with Julia she has to keep away from Erica, and when she is with Erica she has to steer clear of Julia and Meghan. All this gets very sensitive when it comes to sleepovers or birthday parties. "The worst group in the world would be me, Julia, Meghan, and Erica," Helen told me with some relish, and it sounded like the makings of a dreadful B movie, with children playing the adults—like "Bugsy Malone," but with catfights and tantrums.

As Sophie said, when you are a kid, you don't get to make your own decisions about many things; but one decision you do get to make is who your friends are, and Sophie defends this prerogative aggressively. One day, I went with Sophie to a play date at the home of her friend Katrina. Katrina lives in Washington Heights, in a large apartment complex with spacious grounds, and the girls were playing outside, swinging from a tree branch. Then a girl, evidently a neighbor of Katrina's, showed up, and the interaction that followed was as primitive as anything you might see on the Discovery Channel. The newcomer, a freckled girl in bluejeans who looked to be around nine years old, wandered over slowly and stood, quietly, watching Katrina and Sophie at a near distance. They ignored her as she edged closer, and when she tried to start a conversation—"Are you going to play inside later?"—the gymnasts brushed her off. After a while, Katrina and Sophie started to walk back toward the apartment building, and the girl persisted, following them by a step or two, trying to get into their orbit. Suddenly, Sophie's hauteur diminished slightly; she turned to the girl and said, "What shoes are those?" The girl lifted a frayed leg of her bell-bottoms to show a white tennis shoe with a pumped-up heel: "Two-inch sneakers," she said. It looked for a moment as if the sneakers might afford the girl a

NEXT GENERATION • DAVID HOWELL

LAST August, in a chess match at the annual Mind Sports Olympiad, in London, an unknown player named David Howell defeated Dr. John Nunn, a forty-four-year-old former British chess champion and the author of such books as "Tactical Chess Endings" and "Solving in Style." The *Daily Telegraph* commended the winner for his "wonderfully mature game." David Howell is eight years old, the youngest player ever to have beaten a grand master in official play.

On a recent Sunday afternoon, in the living room of his parents' house, in Seaford—a coastal town in the south of England—David put down his yo-yo and replayed his game with Dr. Nunn from memory. (David has been able to recall entire games of chess since he was five, soon after his father, Martin, a doctor, first showed him the moves.) "This is a Ruy Lopez opening. Pawn here. He's trying to develop his pieces in the center, and I'm trying to control the center so he can't build up. Rook here, pawn here." During brief pauses for recollection, he sat upright and fumbled his lower lip with his fingers. Pieces began to mount up beside the board. "Here he could have agreed to a draw," David said. "But he didn't want to go for that. That made me think he was going to win the endgame. But I was slightly better. Rook takes. Now I'm guarding my queen here, and now he can't stop my pawns."

"He dreams chess," Howell's mother, Angeline, who is from Singapore, where she was the women's national fencing champion from 1975 to 1983, said. "He sleep-talks chess moves." Who is he playing in those dreams? "I'm playing myself," David said. He seems to combine smoothly the business of being a chess prodigy with the business of being an eight-year-old, as well as the big brother of a six-year-old. (That's her, to the right.) "We've never pushed him," Dr. Howell said. "We've just gone along with it." By then, David had retired from the conversation and was thwarting his sister's attempts to inflate a balloon, by smacking it with a mailing tube. —Giles Smith

Photograph by Harry Borden

IPG/MATRIX

"Ah, youth!"

• •

longed-for entry into the dyad. But no: Sophie and Katrina continued toward Katrina's apartment, and the uninvited third peeled off toward her own home.

SOPHIE has lived all her life on the Upper West Side, but for her that place-name has none of the connotations that allow it to serve, for anyone over college age, as cultural shorthand for bookishness and liberalism and intellectual intensity. Hers is an Upper West Side of Pottery Barns, multiplexes, and Disney stores; Shakespeare & Co. closed down when she was five years old, and if you ask her where is a good place to get bagels she recommends Hot & Crusty. Her school, though, is an island of the neighborhood's traditional values, a preparatory school for a vanishing world. An important element of the curriculum is ethics class—last year, Sophie and her classmates examined "Jack and the Beanstalk" from a moral perspective, arguing about whether it was acceptable for Jack to have stolen the giant's gold—and one of the principles of the school is to encourage the children to learn to get along with one another in a coöperative spirit. Sophie has a well-developed sense of skepticism about this project.

"Very often, the teachers want you to get along with the people you don't like, so they *put* you with the people you don't like," she explained to me. "There are some people that you sort of ignore, and you are allowed to do that, but you are not exactly allowed to say, 'I don't want to play with you, but I will play with *you*.' If somebody is left out, you are supposed to say, 'Do you want to come play with me?' That is never fun." She told me that another school rule forbade lumping people together. "You are not allowed to make people into groups, like the dumb people, or the stupid people, or the fun people, or the crazy people—things like that," she said. "I mean, you can think whatever you like, but you are not allowed to say it." Her tone grew sarcastic, as if she were stretching a newly developed muscle. "That is *very* nice, that you can think whatever you want in your head," she said.

Although the school's ethic of coöperation seems to have rubbed off on Sophie, she hadn't just accepted the place's value system wholesale. "You know, 'hate' is such a strong word, but there are some times when occasionally you can use it," she told me one day. She and her family were housesitting for some friends in Westport, and we were talking as Sophie was on the swing set, shouting above the creaking of the ropes. "Everybody always says, 'Never say "hate,"'" she went on, rising in pitch and in height simultaneously. "Well, that is too bad for them. Because there are people I hate, and so I say 'hate' about them. But everybody always says, 'Don't say that, you don't know what might happen.' But if you hate that person, so what? Would you really mind if something happened? Like they moved to Alaska or to the far end of the earth, even?"

SOPHIE has never been to a foreign country, but, because she is a New Yorker, she has seen more different sorts of people, and different ways of life, than an eighteen-year-old from almost anywhere else. She has been skirting homeless people on the sidewalk for as long as she has been able to walk; she has wealthy friends who live in the suburbs in a vast home with a swimming pool and a tennis court and separate guest quarters, and even turrets. ("It's not a house, it's a castle," she told me.) In the company of Ariel and Valerie, the babysitter, Sophie rides the subway with a wary alertness on four afternoons a week to get to her three-hour gymnastics practices at Chelsea Piers. The Broadway local serves for her as MTV does for kids in the American heartland, as an ever-changing source of visual stimulation and cultural pedagogy. I was standing with her and Ariel and Valerie on the subway platform at Sixty-sixth Street and Broadway one afternoon; the place was swarming with teen-agers who had just left Martin Luther King, Jr., High School, and Sophie and Ariel were eying a group of three adolescent girls as they sashayed down the platform, commanding the space with their loud voices and voluptuous bodies and braided hair. Valerie, who has been with the Glasers for much of Sophie's life, whispered, "Don't stare," putting an arm around each of the Glaser girls' shoulders and turning them in gently to face each other.

Sophie's gym draws girls from all over the city, and gives her a glimpse into worlds slightly different from the one she shares with her schoolmates. Katrina, who is on Sophie's gymnastics team, comes to Chelsea in a hired town car. Another girl, Tanya, who is eleven and big for her age, rides the subway in from Brooklyn on her own, which Sophie finds remarkable. One day recently, Tanya rode with Sophie and Ariel and Valerie on the crosstown bus from the gym to pick up the subway at Seventh Avenue, and as Tanya put her MetroCard away in her backpack Sophie asked to look through her wallet.

"You have to show me a search warrant," Tanya said.

"What's a search warrant?" Sophie asked.

"It's so when the police think you have drugs in your house they can come and search your house," Tanya said.

"Well, they can't come into my apartment even if they want to," Sophie said.

"Why not?" Tanya asked.

"Because I don't have a search warrant!" Sophie said, triumphantly.

"It's not you who has one, it's the police," Tanya explained, and Sophie looked thoughtful as she filed away another illuminating fact of life.

Sophie insists that she enjoys all her extracurricular activities, but there is some debate within the Glaser family about whether her athletic commitments are excessive. Sophie's parents are both unusually devoted to athleticism: her father hasn't missed a workout for eighteen years, and her mother used to be a professional dancer. Sophie's mom says that until there is a good argument for Sophie to cut back—when gymnastics conflicts with schoolwork—she doesn't want to deny her. She is concerned, though, that Ariel is forced to spend too much time following her big sister around. Mr. Glaser feels that four days a week of gymnastics is too much, and he worries about the obsessive body-consciousness that is pervasive in the dance world. He's much more supportive about soccer, the sport that he played as a child.

Sophie's grandparents try to direct her toward more sedate pursuits. One day at the apartment, they stopped by just as Sophie and Ariel were having one of their living-room acrobatics workouts. "Isn't it time to read a book now?" Sophie's grandmother asked ineffectually, as she sat in an armchair, cringing as Sophie's foot flew within inches of her head. "No," Sophie replied, closing the debate by standing on her head again.

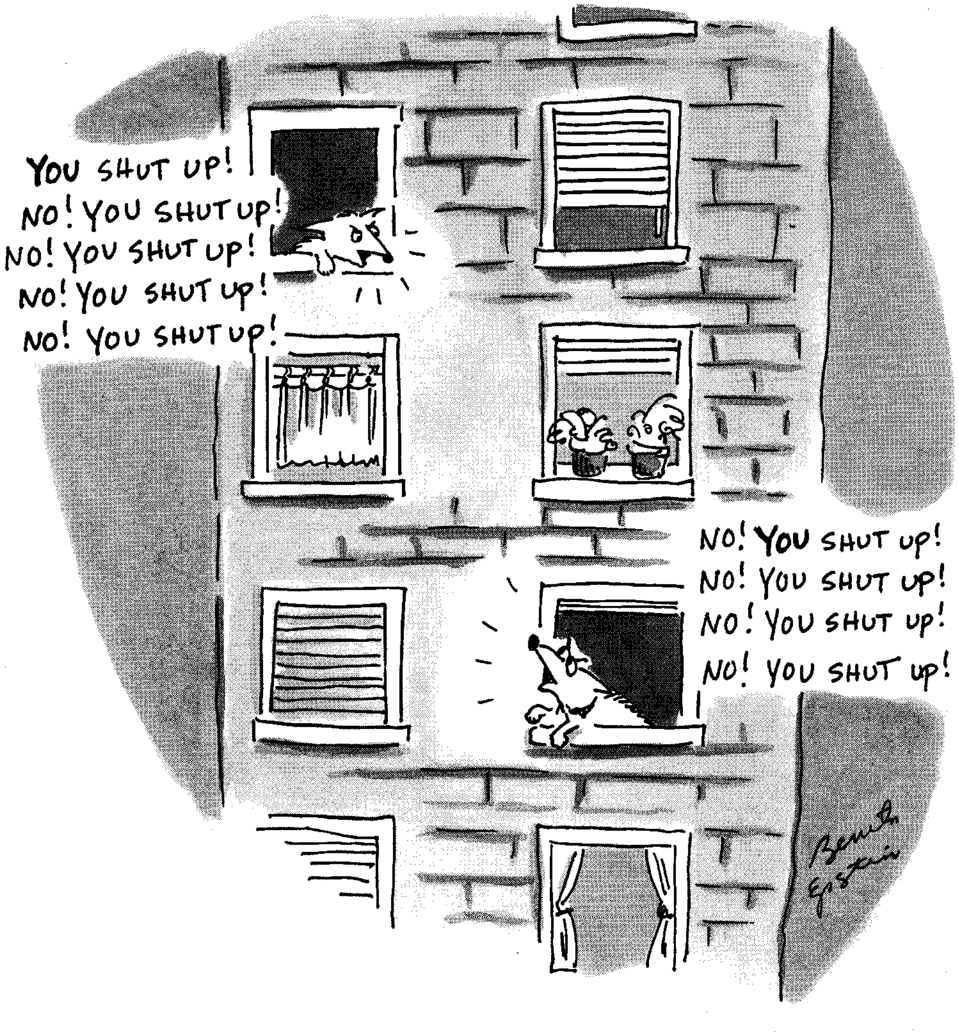
SOME experts on child development believe that boredom is an essential and even useful aspect of childhood, but it is hard to imagine that Sophie will remember her youth as an age of indolence. The Glaser household runs with a remarkable degree of precision, one that is due in part to the powers of organization and discipline of Sophie's mother ("Anne is Mussolini," Sophie's father told me), and in part to the beneficence and flexibility of Valerie. It is due, too, to the compliance of the girls, who are almost as disciplined away from the barre and the beam as they are at them.

One evening, I returned home with Mrs. Glaser and the girls after gymnastics. "I want you to get straight in the shower when we get home," Mrs. Glaser was saying to Sophie and Ariel.

"Can't we have a bath?" whined Ariel.

"We don't have time for a bath," Sophie's mom said firmly. It was a little after 7 P.M., and Mrs. Glaser, who had arrived at Chelsea Piers at around five-forty-five and relieved Valerie, was hustling the girls out of the gym and into a van driven by the father of one of Sophie's teammates, who regularly gives them a lift home. On the ride up the West Side Highway, the girls sat in the back seat and snacked on flatbread and whispered; when they arrived at the apartment, Sophie vanished into the shower while Ariel danced around the apartment naked. Sophie's mom started preparing the girls' supper of chicken nuggets and raw vegetables, and her dad, who was home unusually early, started cooking some pasta for himself and for me.

Sophie emerged in her pajamas and sat down at the dining table with her homework: the week's list of spelling words, ten of which she was to use in sentences. It took Sophie a little while to get herself in order—finding the right piece of paper, finding a pencil, figuring out what, exactly, to call the assignment—and then she laboriously began to write her sentences. "'Flash,'" she said. "'I saw a flash of green light.' Is that all right, Mommy?" She continued down the list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slowly. “ ‘Dull.’ ‘I had a dull weekend.’ Is weekend spelled ‘w-e-e-k’ or ‘w-e-a-k’?” she asked. Ariel, who had been told to be quiet while Sophie did her homework, sat with a book that she wasn’t yet able to read, murmuring to herself.

Dinner was ready at around eight, so Sophie set the homework aside to eat. First, she picked off all the breading, then ate all the chicken nuggets but one, which she surreptitiously fed to Gretchen under the table. Then she went into her parents’ bedroom to finish her sentences. After Ariel went to bed, at eight-thirty, there was still more homework to do: now Sophie had to put the vocabulary words into lists according to their vowel sounds, and then move consonants around to create new words. “I’m getting pencil cramps,” she complained.

Finally, having finished these exercises just after nine, she had one more task left: her daily assignment of half an hour of reading. She sat down with her mother at the table, opened to Chapter 7 of “Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets,” and read aloud. She was fairly fluent, and was excited by the story, though she had little patience for her own errors and occasionally dropped her head to the page and rubbed her eyes in weariness. She stumbled over the word “entrust”: “En-*thurst*?” she stabbed. “En-*thurst*. En-*thrust*. En-*thurst*.” She threw her head back, leaned on her mother’s shoulder, and scrunched her eyes closed: “Oh, I could care *less* what it is,” she said. After thirty minutes of reading, Mrs. Glaser said it was time to stop. “Will you read now, Mommy?” Sophie asked, eager to enjoy the story without the effort of reading it herself. But it was too late for that; she went to her bedroom and climbed carefully around the sleeping Ariel. It was nine-forty, a little after her usual bedtime of half past nine, and Sophie had been going flat out for more than fourteen hours.

If you talk to Sophie about her likes and dislikes, you can see how far she has internalized her mother’s judgments about what is correct and appropriate. For example, Sophie is not allowed to watch very much television: she and Ariel get to see an hour or so of cartoons on weekend mornings, and sometimes they watch “The Brady Bunch” in the evenings. When I asked Sophie why she watched so little TV, she said, “I’m not allowed. But I am not a big fan of TV.”

Following the rules is a point of pride for the girls: One evening, their grandparents took them to John’s for pizza, and afterward Sophie asked if they could get ice cream. Her grandfather reluctantly agreed, and so we all walked up Columbus Avenue toward the local Häagen-Dazs. Suddenly, Ariel stopped in her tracks. “We *can’t* have ice cream,” she said. “Why not?” her grandmother asked. “Because Mommy said that we could have cake later,” she explained. “And we can’t have ice cream *and* cake.” Sophie looked at her sister with an expression of disbelief, but she knew that she couldn’t argue with the rules. “We might as well turn around and go home,” she said, and they did.

Sophie can show the same kind of self-regulation in her emotional life. Earlier that afternoon, she and I took a walk in the neighborhood, and I asked her what she was afraid of. She paused, then said, “I’m afraid of guns.”

I wondered whether she had heard about school shootings, so I asked whether she knew what Columbine was. “No,” she said, with a tight smile. “I don’t know, and I don’t want to know anything.” Her voice dropping to a stage whisper, she said, “My grandma and grandpa always say, ‘You need to know what is going on.’ But I *know* what is going on! I don’t *want* to know what is going on!”

I asked her to tell me about the saddest thing that had ever happened to her, and she said, “This is going to sound weird, because I was, like, a baby when my uncle died, so I didn’t really know anything was going on. So definitely, if I was older and I knew what was going on, it would *definitely* be my uncle. But, I mean, I was barely there. So for me it was sort of like when my cat Haley died. They had to take her to the vet and put her to sleep, and, the day before, my dad said, ‘One of these days she is going to have to go.’ I was sort of not paying attention. I mean, I knew what he was trying to say to me, but I was sort of pretending not to hear, because I didn’t want to hear. Do you ever have that feeling, where the truth is coming but you don’t want to know the truth?”

“Are you insane?” Sophie bellowed into the telephone receiver.

It was a weekday evening, and Sophie and I had spent the afternoon together, visiting, at her request, the chil-

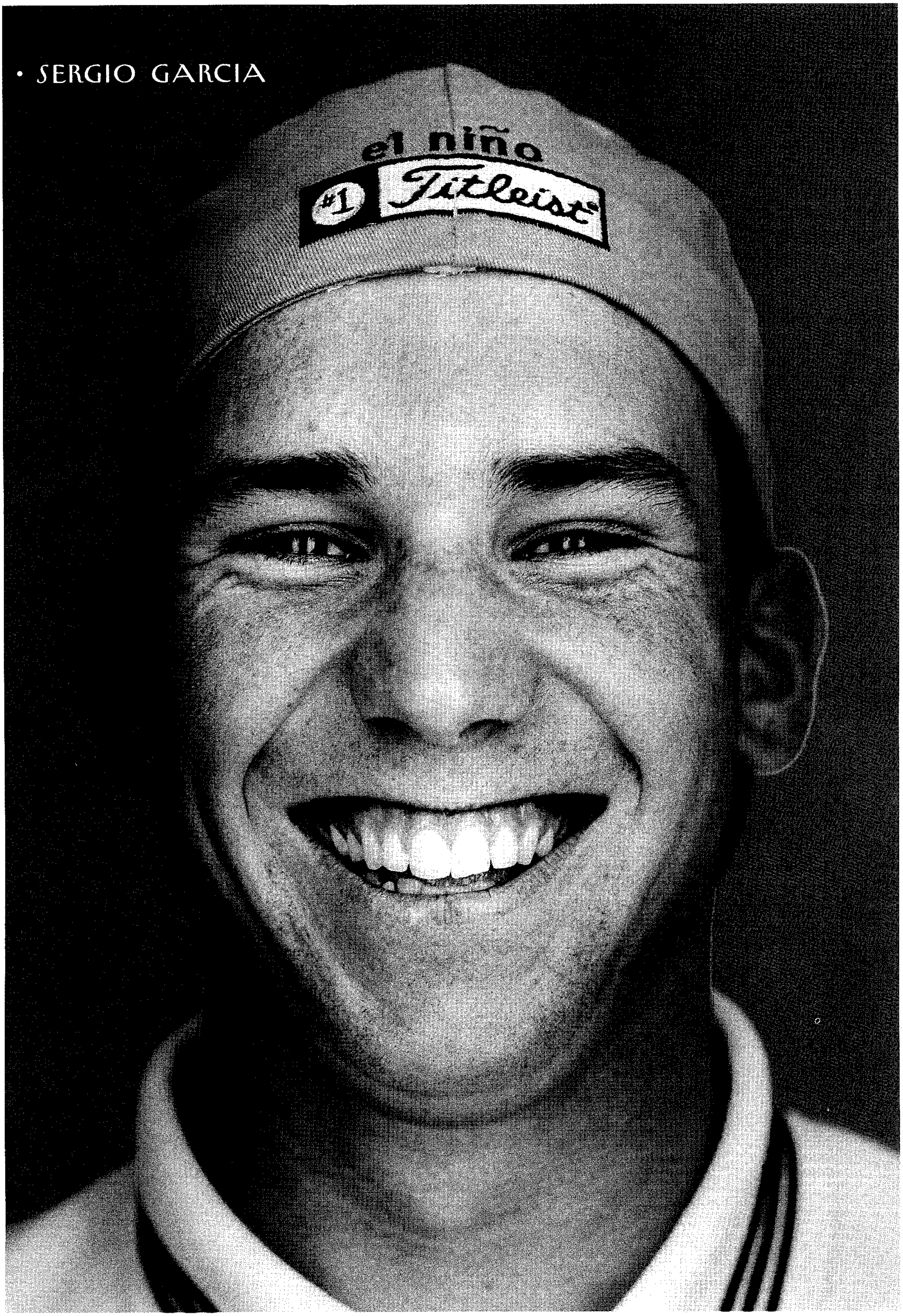
NEXT GENERATION

When Tiger Woods became a professional golfer, in 1996, a cranky old sportswriter I know predicted that he would never live up to his hype. A short time later, after Woods had won a pair of P.G.A. Tour events, the same sportswriter crowed that Tiger would be the salvation of professional golf. A couple of months after that, when Woods had become the youngest player ever to win the Masters, the sportswriter moaned that Woods was going to ruin golf by making all the other players look like choppers.

Golf has survived, in part because other players in their twenties—among them David Duval, Justin Leonard, and Phil Mickelson—have provided thrills when Woods has been off his game. And now those talented whippersnappers have been joined by the nineteen-year-old Spaniard Sergio Garcia, whom a certain cranky sportswriter I know has guardedly called “the next Tiger Woods.” Garcia, who is known in Spain as El Niño, took up golf at three, won his club championship at twelve, made his first cut in a European P.G.A. Tour event at fourteen, and won his first professional tournament, the Catalonia Open, as an amateur, at seventeen. That was a little over a year ago. In August, he very nearly snatched the P.G.A. Championship from Woods and, while doing so, built a boisterous following among (notoriously fickle) American fans. Last month, he was one of the standouts in what may have been the most thrilling Ryder Cup ever, and he was referred to by television commentators as both “the real deal” and “this hundred-and-forty-pound piece of brilliance.” He has an exuberant sense of fun—he took time out from one of his Ryder Cup matches to give a kiss to the American captain’s wife—and a permanently cheerful demeanor, which belies his cutthroat competitive instincts. Like Woods, he shows no sign of being intimidated by the immensity of his own promise. During a television interview at the Spanish Open last year, he was asked whether he was frightened to be competing with some of the world’s greatest players. “No,” he said, “I’m not.” —David Owen

Photograph by Martin Schoeller

• SERGIO GARCIA


el niño
#1 Titleist

SABA

dren's clothing department at Macy's. Her tastes were catholic: she expressed familiarity with the DKNY label, which she nonetheless pronounced "Dinky," but she also admired a pair of bluejeans with a Winnie the Pooh appliqué.

After Macy's, Sophie had wanted to visit her mother's office, where she swivelled on the office chair for a while, asked whether there were any games loaded into her mom's computer (there weren't), and secured permission to watch the videotape of "You've Got Mail" later on. It was Mrs. Glaser, working late, who was now on the receiving end of Sophie's wrath—"Are you *insane*?" Sophie shouted again—because she was telling Sophie that she couldn't stay up late enough to watch the end of the movie.

As it turned out, by the time we had arrived home with the video, and Valerie had prepared a supper of penne with pesto for the girls, and Valerie had left, and another—teen-age—babysitter had arrived, and the girls had played several rounds of rummy and a card game called Secret, and Sophie's dad had come home from work and had made supper for himself and me, it was well after 7 P.M. That meant the video wouldn't be over before Sophie had to go to bed. She had been watching the movie with considerable engagement, pointing out familiar Upper West Side locations, and contemplating the lot of Meg Ryan, and when her mother called with the bad news Sophie was outraged at the injustice. She slammed down the phone and tearfully stormed at her father, "We might as well turn it off *now* if we can't watch the end of it."

The whole evening had been emotionally overwrought. When Sophie and I got home, Ariel, who had been feeling left out, was sulky and resentful; as soon as her father came in, her self-pity manifested itself in weepiness and a stomach ache. Sophie was infuriated by what looked to her like her sister's naked attention-seeking. "She was *fine* until you arrived," she yelled at her father, before breaking down into tears herself and climbing into his arms.

After the call from Sophie's mom, her dad played good cop. "Look, it's only six-forty," he said with a wink, pointing at the clock, which read seven-forty. But Sophie was too furious to catch on. "Come on, let's just keep watching for the time being," he said, and Sophie grudgingly returned to her place on the sofa, sitting on her father's left side and reclining into his lap, while Ariel did the same on the right. For the next hour or so, the girls watched silently, refusing to go and brush their teeth, and keeping their eyes defiantly open as they slipped inexorably into sleepiness.

To watch Sophie with her parents is to see a love affair at the cusp of a transition, as her unquestioning infatuation begins to evolve into the more tempestuous, critical bond that an adolescent experiences with her parents: it won't be long before Sophie thinks *everything* her parents do is insane and unjust. For the moment, though, Sophie is still largely on the child's side of the divide, where parents are admirable, not contemptible. When she told me that she would like it if everyone could choose what age to be, she added the caveat that adults could not become kids again. "Because then we wouldn't have anybody to look up to, and that would be really bad," she said. "I think that would be terrifying."

And she is still young enough to want her parents to participate in her new experiences, like her discovery of pop music. One weekend, I rode with the Glasers in the family car, a slightly shabby Honda Accord, which they keep in a nearby garage, to visit some friends who live in Pelham, ten miles outside of the city. As soon as we got into the car, Ariel and Sophie started arguing over whose CD they would listen to—Ariel wanted the "Tarzan" soundtrack, and Sophie was lobbying for the Backstreet Boys, who are the universal favorite among third graders. Sophie's mom ruled that we would listen to a few tracks from "Tarzan," and then switch to Sophie's CD. When the Backstreet Boys came on, Sophie and Ariel sang along with the hit "Larger Than Life."

Sophie had the CD case in her lap, and she gave me a breakdown of the band. "Most people's favorite is Nick, but my favorite is Kevin, because everyone likes Nick," she explained. "Nick is O.K. Howie is O.K. But A.J. and Brian I don't like." She leaned forward and quizzed her mother.

"Which one do I like, Mommy?" she asked.

"Kevin," said Sophie's mom, confidently.

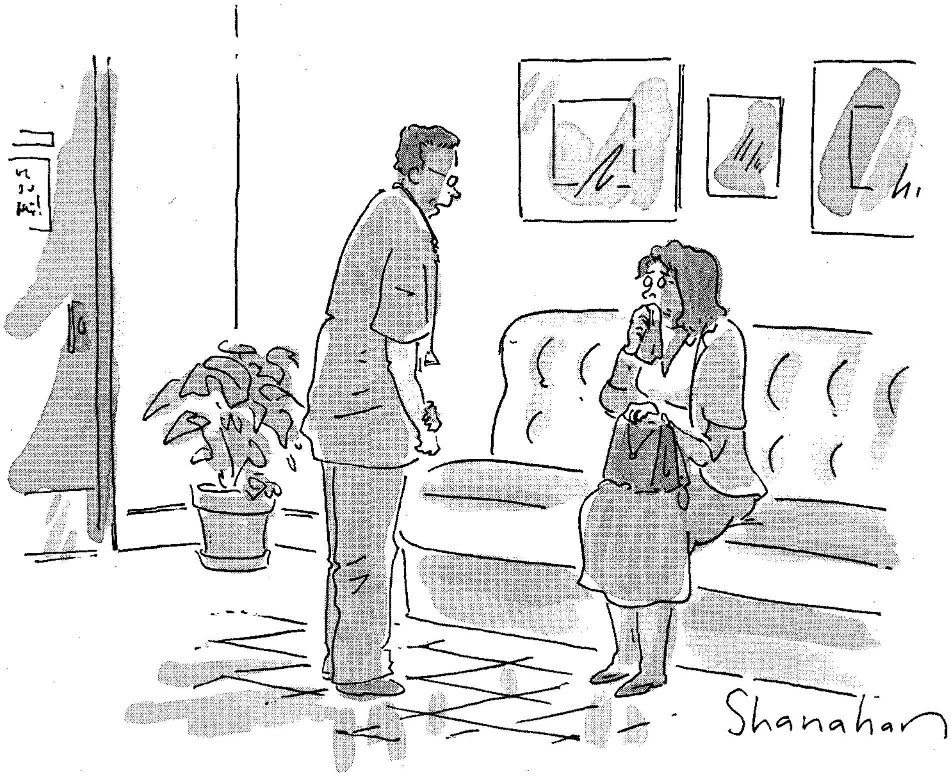
"And which ones are O.K.?"

"Er—Nick is O.K.?" Sophie's mom asked, tentatively.

"Nick and Howie are O.K. And which ones don't I like?"

Mrs. Glaser drew a blank.

"A.J. and Brian are the ones I don't like," Sophie said impatiently.



"If it's any consolation, toward the end he was high as a kite."

BOYS BUILD FORTS

Petrified teeth from some fierce -osaurus,
the rocks my friend Donny and I piled up
in the middle of a field to build a fort.
The wind through its chinks made a desolate sound
I loved. We could have been out on the tundra,
bone-tired from tracking musk oxen all day.
It thrilled me to crouch in a cow pasture
and dream *I could live here.* I pictured
a cook fire, a skillet, two fried eggs
agog at my good fortune. . . . Years later,
during puberty, I saw Charles Atlas
ads in the back of my comic books
and thought those muscles would look fine
on me. It was the same idea of building
a fort, the same ideal of self-sufficiency. . . .
Of course it's a crock. My parents are gone.
They left me a furnished house, everything
I pictured for my fort, and more: mildew
that wears marching boots, a roof that leaks. I see
how things stand. I see how people get sick.
Every body that walks this earth
and all the ways we try to feel safe:
all are bound to fall apart. My sweet father
and mother, both dead. That cold creeps in
and I feel as though a bear has torn
my chest open, and ravaged the frail
honeycomb built there by my folks,
and left me in a field to fill with snow.

—ROGER FANNING

As much as Sophie wants her parents to join in her enthusiasms, she is old enough to have begun craving privacy, something that seems elusive in her crowded and scheduled life. I asked her one day whether she had ever kept a journal, and she told me that she had been required to write one in first grade, but that the assignment stipulated that no one was to write down any secrets.

"You were allowed to write, 'I had a dog. His name was Spot. I went fishing,'" she said. "But it is not very interesting to say, 'I had a dog. His name is Spot. I went fishing.' It is, like, if you can't write secrets in it, then why have it?"

I agreed that it was important to have some secrets. "I *have*," Sophie said emphatically.

I told Sophie that when I was nine I kept a journal, which I still have. And I described some of the things I'd written about—playing with my friends, what I did at school that day.

"Or people you hate, stuff like that," Sophie suggested. "But when someone finds out, it's really bad. Like in 'Harriet the Spy.' She has a journal and they read it, and they tell the whole wide world."

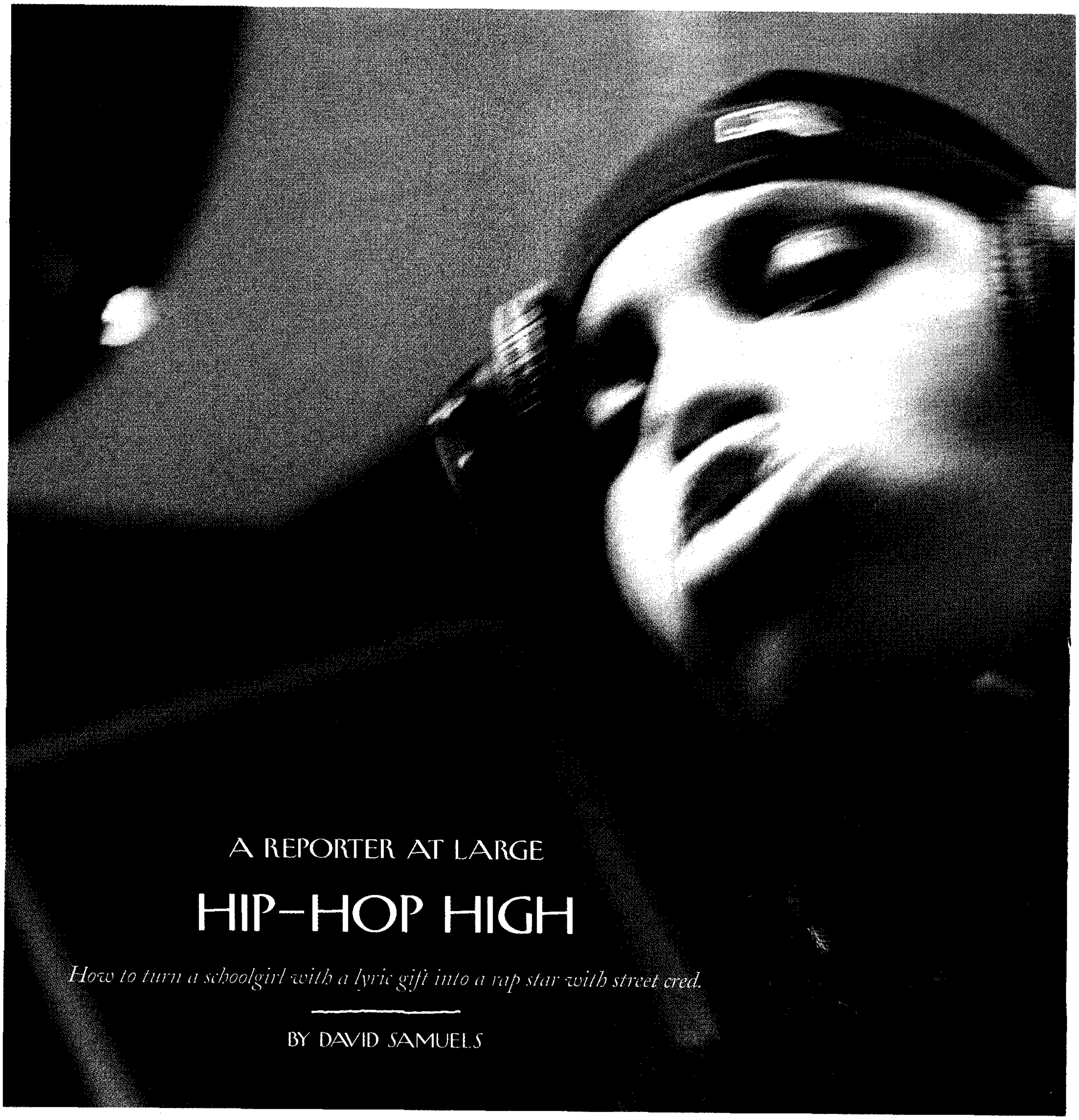
With her need for secrets and her longings for independence, Sophie has just begun to see the foreign country of adulthood and to imagine herself there. I asked her whether she thought she'd get married and have kids when she is older, and she said she didn't know—but she did know that it was way too early to be definitive about anything. "Lots of my friends say they don't want to have kids and they don't want to get married," she said. "And I am, like, 'That's going to change, you know. That's *really* going to change.'"

Sometimes you can see a girl like Sophie undergoing change before your eyes. On the day that the Glasers spent in Pelham, the two families went to the Pelham Country Club's swimming pool, and Sophie played happily in the water with her sister and the three other children: Emma, who was three, Beth, who was five, and Sam, seven. But later in the day, when we returned to the house, Sophie became restless. The five kids descended to a large basement rec room to try to find a game to play together. Beth suggested they play house, but Sam wasn't interested. Ariel wanted to play shopping, but Sophie vetoed that. "We'll never find something we all want to do, Ariel, because you are five and I am eight," she said, wearily.

When it was time for dinner, barbecued chicken and sweet corn, I joined the five kids at their table, out in the back yard, while the adults ate inside. The children were excitable, partly as a result of having spent all day in the sun and the water, and partly because of the novelty of having an adult stooping to their level. Sophie, who was the only one big enough not to have had her chicken cut up for her, gnawed on a drumstick, grinning as she smeared her face with rather more barbecue sauce than was necessary. Emma, who was sitting next to me, fell into uncontrollable giggles when she realized that she had wiped her hands all over my paper napkin, as well as her own. Then Sophie made the same mistake with Sam's napkin, and soon they were all laughing loudly, like the hyenas in "The Lion King," one child taking over when another's laughter diminished, as if to keep the flame of hilarity alight at all costs. Sophie suddenly fixed me with a look, like an actor breaking the fourth wall, and said, "This is what kids talk about when they are together."

Then Sam started making flatulent noises by pressing his hands against his mouth and blowing, and his two sisters tried to copy him, and Ariel looked on at the scene, shocked but deeply amused. This "South Park" turn of events was too much for Sophie, who got up from the table and sat on a garden wall a few feet away.

"You're embarrassing me," she said, strenuously, and took off into the house. A minute or two later, I caught a glimpse of her as she was peeping through a bathroom window looking out on the back yard. She wasn't ready to go into the dining room and join the adults at their table yet; but she'd left the kids behind. And so she hovered between the two worlds—watching and waiting for something to happen that might tell her where she should go next. ♦

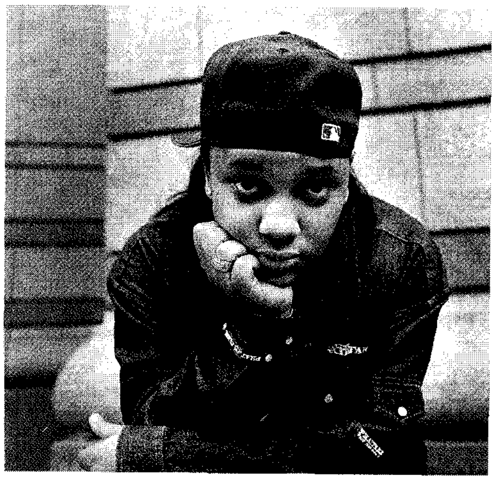


A REPORTER AT LARGE

HIP-HOP HIGH

How to turn a schoolgirl with a lyric gift into a rap star with street cred.

BY DAVID SAMUELS



Def Jam Records, Kevin Liles likes to say, signs only stars. In his nearly two years as president of Def Jam, Liles has personally signed one star—a seventeen-year-old rapper from Teaneck, New Jersey, named Shanell Jones, who is also known as Lady Luck.

"I was on my way to work," Liles recently recalled, talking about the first time he heard her, one morning in February, in the back seat of his Lincoln Town Car. "Luck was on the radio, because she had just won five days in a row on 'Check the Rhyme,' on Hot 97." Hot 97 is the most listened-to hip-hop station in New York. Every weekday morning, starting at seven-twenty, the hosts of "Check the Rhyme" invite unknown rappers to call in and start rapping. The caller with the best verses is asked to phone in again the following morning. Anyone who wins the competition five days in a row is invited to the Hot 97 studios, on Hudson Street, to rhyme on the air.

Liles was listening to Hot 97's latest winner when his cell phone rang. The caller was Erick Sermon, the leader of a Def Jam rap group called EPMD. "Yo, do you hear this girl on Hot 97?" Sermon said. Liles was already impressed. The girl was rapping off the top of her head, lighting up the airwaves with the sorts of inventive rhymes and electric phrases that would stick in the heads of teen-age hip-hop fans as they rode the subways and buses to school.

"I said, 'Yo, she's ill,'" Liles recalled. "So he said, 'Yo, let's call up there.' So we call up there, and I said to one of the hosts, 'Yo, tell the girl and her parents to come directly to my office. Do not stop anywhere else.'"

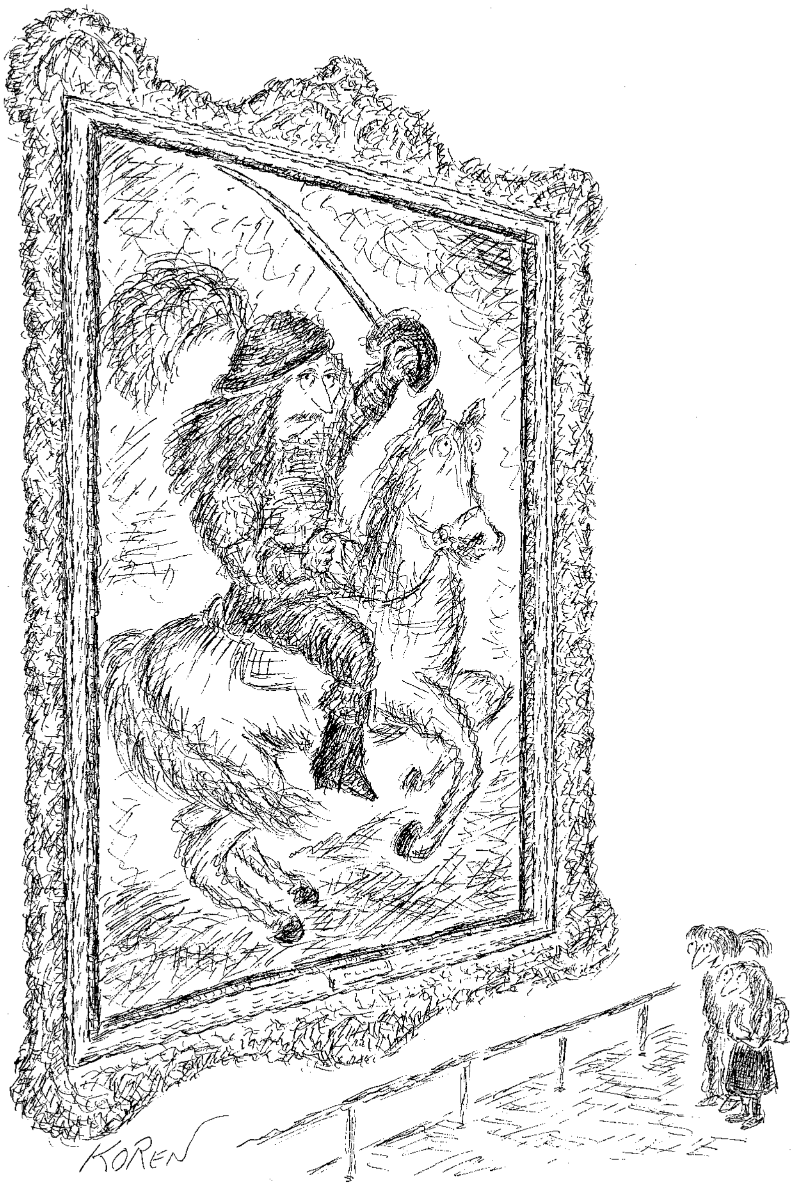
When Shanell Jones walked into his office with her mother and stepfather later that morning, Liles saw a chubby girl with lively brown eyes, toffee-colored skin, and a pretty face, who was dressed in a sweatshirt, a pair of Nike Air Jordan sneakers, and a fitted baseball cap cocked to one side, just like thousands of other seventeen-year-olds in New York. A minute or two later, he saw something else. "A star can walk in and light up the room," he said. "And she did that when she came into my office and started to rhyme." When she finished rhyming, Liles called Lyor Cohen, the president of the label's parent group, Island Def Jam, and said that he'd found a star. The two executives took Shanell and her parents to lunch, and then to dinner. Two weeks later, Liles sent her a dozen red roses for Valentine's Day.

As word of Def Jam's interest in Shanell Jones spread through the tight-knit community of rap, executives at other labels, including Bad Boy, Atlantic, and Elektra, also became interested in her, and a bidding war ensued. Def Jam won. On March 3rd, Liles signed the girl who called herself Lady Luck to a new-artist contract with Def Jam. The contract obligated her to be the principal rapper on five albums, for which she would receive various payments and benefits, including rent money for an apartment of her own, college tuition, a car, and thousands of dollars' worth of jewelry—altogether, a package worth somewhere between half a million and a million dollars.

What Liles acquired was a bubbly seventeen-year-old who had wanted to be a rap star since the age of five, when she spoke her first rhyme. More important, he had found a performer who might fill a conspicuous gap in Def Jam's mostly male lineup of rap stars—self-invented urban superhero characters like LL Cool J, Jay-Z, DMX, Redman, Method Man, and Ja Rule, who rap about living large and keeping it real, about wearing platinum chains and driving Mercedes-Benzes, selling crack and murdering rivals. Liles needed a hard-rhyming female rapper who, with proper guidance, could become Def Jam's answer to superwoman rappers like Eve, L'il Kim, and Rah Digga, who record for other labels.

One's chances of commercial success as a rapper are determined, in large part, by the persona or character one projects, and how vividly it stands out from the personae of the other hot rappers of the moment. "When you think about Eve," Liles explained to me, "if Eve's man was in a gunfight and he got shot, she would pick up his gun and start shooting at the other guy. L'il Kim would fuck that other man. Rah Digga would stab that other man. Luck would have a great time with

"I'm trying to take everyone with me," Shanell Jones says of her friends, "but there's a lot of pressure. Niggas don't do what I tell them." Photographs by Bastienne Schmidt.



"I think he was a celebrity."

that man, and then hit him in the head with a bat. So all of them have their own special qualities."

For all of Liles's faith in his new star, though, Shanell's future is far from guaranteed. The apartment, the car, the jewelry come to her as, in effect, advances against royalties; if she fails to produce hits, the perks could vanish overnight. Moreover, if she does succeed in making Lady Luck a household name, there is a more insidious danger to worry about. "All too often, the character simply kills off the real person," Lyor Cohen told me. "It's easy to understand why. You can wake up tomorrow as Earl Simmons, a kid from a bad neighborhood whom no one ever gave a fuck about for the first twenty-six years of his life. Or you can be DMX"—Simmons's rap name—"a character who sells million of records, and whom every kid in America loves, and behave like DMX does in his rhymes." It is no accident that Tupac Shakur and Biggie Smalls, rap music's two biggest stars of the nineties, were shot to death before the age of thirty. "You pray that that doesn't happen," Cohen said, "but often, much too often, it does."

One afternoon a few weeks before the start of Shanell Jones's senior year at Teaneck High School, she was camped out on a beige couch in the office of DJ Enuff, the executive at Def Jam who is responsible for guiding her career. She had spent much of the summer in the recording company's headquarters, on the twenty-seventh floor of the Worldwide Plaza office tower, on Eighth Avenue, getting to know everyone who would be involved in turning her into the street-talking rapper known as Lady Luck. Most mornings, she had worked out with a personal trainer named Pop, who was charged with reducing her thighs, waist, and butt. Most afternoons, she had been holed up in DJ Enuff's office listening to a vast assortment of CDs and DATs (digital audiotapes) for instrumental tracks that might mesh with her lyrics.

On this afternoon, Shanell looked nothing like the bat-wielding vixen of Kevin Liles's dreams. She was wearing a Cleveland Indians baseball cap, a yellow Iceberg T-shirt emblazoned with a cartoon of Fido the dog, jeans that stopped in the middle of her calves, and a pair of brand-new blue-and-white Nikes. Around her neck was a diamond-studded platinum four-leaf clover, which the label had given her after she signed the contract. DJ Enuff, a friendly, bearlike man who also spins records on Hot 97, was on the phone, asking a friend to pick up his laundry.

Earlier in the summer, Lady Luck had made her recording début, a thirty-second guest appearance on "Symphony 2000," a song on EPMD's last album, "Out of Business." When I asked how she was enjoying her first taste of fame, she sighed, then said, "I have a hundred boyfriends. They say, 'Lady Luck, she my baby mama.' I have brothers and sisters I never met before in my life. And I have eight bars on one song on someone else's album. So imagine what happens when I go platinum."

Her beeper went off, and she grabbed her cell phone. "All right, Mahogany," she cooed. "I love you with your pretty hair." She flirted some more, then turned to business: "I got a call from a movie person—a lady named Heidi, working on the 'Next Friday' soundtrack. I need a song."

Mahogany is a young rap producer from the South Bronx who made his mark last year, when he produced an instrumental track on Jay-Z's quadruple-platinum album, "Hard Knock Life, Volume 2." In rap, producers create the multi-layered instrumental tracks that provide the background—the beats and sonic atmosphere—behind the lyrics. Like Mahogany, most producers operate as free agents, going from label to label with their arsenal of tracks, hoping to make a quick sale with an up-and-coming rapper like Lady Luck and curious to see whether the label's faith in the newcomer's talent is justified.

A few minutes later, Mahogany appeared in DJ Enuff's office. He is a tall, well-built young man, and was wearing a gray T-shirt and a fitted Yankees cap; a cell phone peeked out from a pocket of his spacious jeans. Lady Luck frowned at the Yankees cap. "I told them all about your pretty hair," she teased. Mahogany responded with a shy smile, exposing a gold-framed tooth. He handed her a CD, which she popped into DJ Enuff's stereo, and then he sat down on the couch and began bobbing his head to the beat, glancing back and forth from Lady Luck to DJ Enuff, in a way that suggested he was confident in his work and only mildly interested in their reaction.

"You got some hot shit here," Lady Luck said, after listening to the third track. The music was paralyzingly loud. As the fourth track came on, DJ Enuff turned up the volume, and the faintest shadow of a smile appeared at the corners of Mahogany's mouth.

"I gonna spit," Lady Luck said, a few bars into the track, and she began improvising a verse: "I keep my gat in my bra strap . . . "

DJ Enuff nodded and grinned. Mahogany grinned, too. The mating dance between rapper and producer had begun.

Next, Lady Luck dropped in on her publicist, Gabby Peluso. Although the sounds in Def Jam's offices are resolutely black—rap music booms from behind closed doors and executives greet one another with expressions like "Whassup, dawg?" and "You my nigga"—the heads of the label's marketing, production, and distribution are a multiracial mix. Bounding into the publicist's office, Lady Luck spotted a picture of herself on the party page of an issue of *Vibe* that was lying open on Peluso's desk. "That's me!" she screamed.

"I love new artists," Peluso said indulgently.

Lady Luck's small talk with the publicist was interrupted by the arrival of Ron Robinson, the manager of Ja Rule, a Def Jam rapper whose latest album had just gone platinum. Wearing a white striped "ENYCE" baseball shirt, he entered with a smirk that suggested he'd come to give the publicist a hard time.

"I be trying to get Ja to come up here," he said. "He say, 'Man, fuck that.' Because the nigga be *tired*."

"Ron and Ja used to come to my office every day and eat," Peluso explained to Lady Luck. "That's when they didn't have any money. I'd say, 'Ja, I have an interview for you inside a black hole.' And he'd do it. And now . . ."

"The nigga freaks *out*," Robinson said, spreading his arms to indicate the magnitude of the situation. "It's the animal y'all created. Because the nigga was *never* like that before."

"And everything in his songs is 'murder, murder, murder,' " Peluso said, frowning.

"We makin' songs for *real* niggas, y'all," Robinson said. Then, catching Peluso's glare, he demurred, "Well, not *everything* is murder."

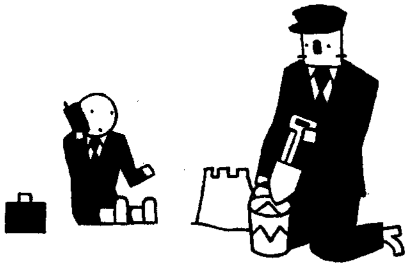
Peluso picked up a copy of Ja Rule's platinum album, "Venni Vetti Vecci," and began reading the song titles listed on the back: " 'Murda,' 'Murda 4 Life,' 'The Murderers.' "

Robinson shrugged. "We're Murder, Inc.," he said.

Lady Luck listened to all this with the attentiveness of an A student. When Robinson left, she reassured Peluso that even after she had sold millions of records she would always show up for interviews and be on time. The publicist nodded skeptically.

Outside Peluso's office, Lady Luck skipped down the tan-carpeted hallway, rhyming:

Lady,
arrogant cat . . .
y'all stay behind me like my backpack
strap on the condom
and stay riding to fame
rock harder
till the whole world is screaming my name.



THERE is no shortage of teen-agers in hooded sweatshirts and baggy jeans who, like Shanell Jones, write down rhymes in their spiral notebooks, listen obsessively to hip-hop radio stations like Hot 97 and KISS FM, beg friends in the business for studio time, send demo tapes off to record companies, and dream of the moment when they will be signed to a million-dollar contract with a label like Def Jam and the larger-than-life character inside them will erupt into the world with blazing, digitally mastered clarity. For them, making it in a business that has transformed the insular experience of black urban life into a billion-dollar-a-year segment of the music industry is a way to stay true to their roots while living the American Dream. Shanell credits her success so far to the intervention of a higher power. "God told me to call Hot 97," she says.

She was born in 1982, in Englewood, New Jersey—the daughter of parents who had one foot in the suburbs and the other on the inner-city streets. Her mother, Donna, worked in the promotions department of Sugarhill records, a small label in Englewood which, in 1979, had released the first rap recording, the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight." Shanell's father ran betting spots in Harlem and didn't spend much time with his wife and two daughters. (Shanell has a younger sister, Shaté.) When Shanell was nine, the relationship broke up.

Shanell says that in those days her mother used cocaine. "But she wasn't a crackhead," she adds. "She did her thing on the weekends. There was always money for rent and utilities and food. But it was scary. When we got saved, she left all of that behind."

As a child, Shanell was a frequent visitor to Sugarhill's studio, where she recited her early rhymes for producers, engineers, and old-school rappers like Melle Mel and Master Gee. They called her the Sugarhill Baby. "I always wanted to be a rapper," Shanell told me. "I remember once writing to a friend in the fifth grade about how I had met Russell Simmons"—then the president of Def Jam—"and how I had a contract with Def Jam. Which was a lie."

In 1995, when Shanell turned fourteen, her mother married a man named Kory Ward, who had dreamed of becoming a rapper, and who had performed briefly with a touring version of the Sugarhill Gang, before going to work in a sneakers store. That year, Donna Ward was saved. The family started going to church regularly, and two summers ago Shanell herself was saved when she spent a weekend at a Christian retreat. Since then, she has tried to balance her faith with her love of rapping and the usual temptations of teenage life. She doesn't smoke, and she recently swore off hard liquor. "That was me two weeks ago," she recalled with solemn conviction. In August, she and her parents bought a house in Teaneck—the first house the family has ever owned. Her parents are supportive of her career as a rapper, she says, but they both wish that Lady Luck didn't curse so much when she rhymes.

Shanell's day at Def Jam didn't end until six o'clock. That allowed her only a couple of hours to get herself home to Teaneck and into party clothes for a celebration of the latest release by the rappers Method Man and Redman, which was to be held later in the evening, back in Manhattan. Along for the ride, in a town car that snaked up the West Side Highway and across the George Washington Bridge, were Shanell's second cousin Shan and her friend Saleem. They are both rappers and members of Lady Luck's backup crew, the Cuzones. Saleem, who is seventeen, is tall and good-looking, and has a shy, sweet manner. Shan, who is also seventeen, is stocky and likable, with a long, thin, intelligent face, a wispy goatee, and an enormous pair of Versace glasses.

The three of them carried on much of their conversation in rhymes inspired by what they could see out the windows. "A blacked-out Benz . . ." Shan began at one point.

Before he could go on, Shanell jumped in. "That's not good enough," she said. "Say you see two ads for a Benz in the paper. One just says 'black Benz.' The other says, '1999 model, custom-leather interior, with twenty-two-inch platinum hubcaps, and three television sets.' Now, which one are you going to cop?"

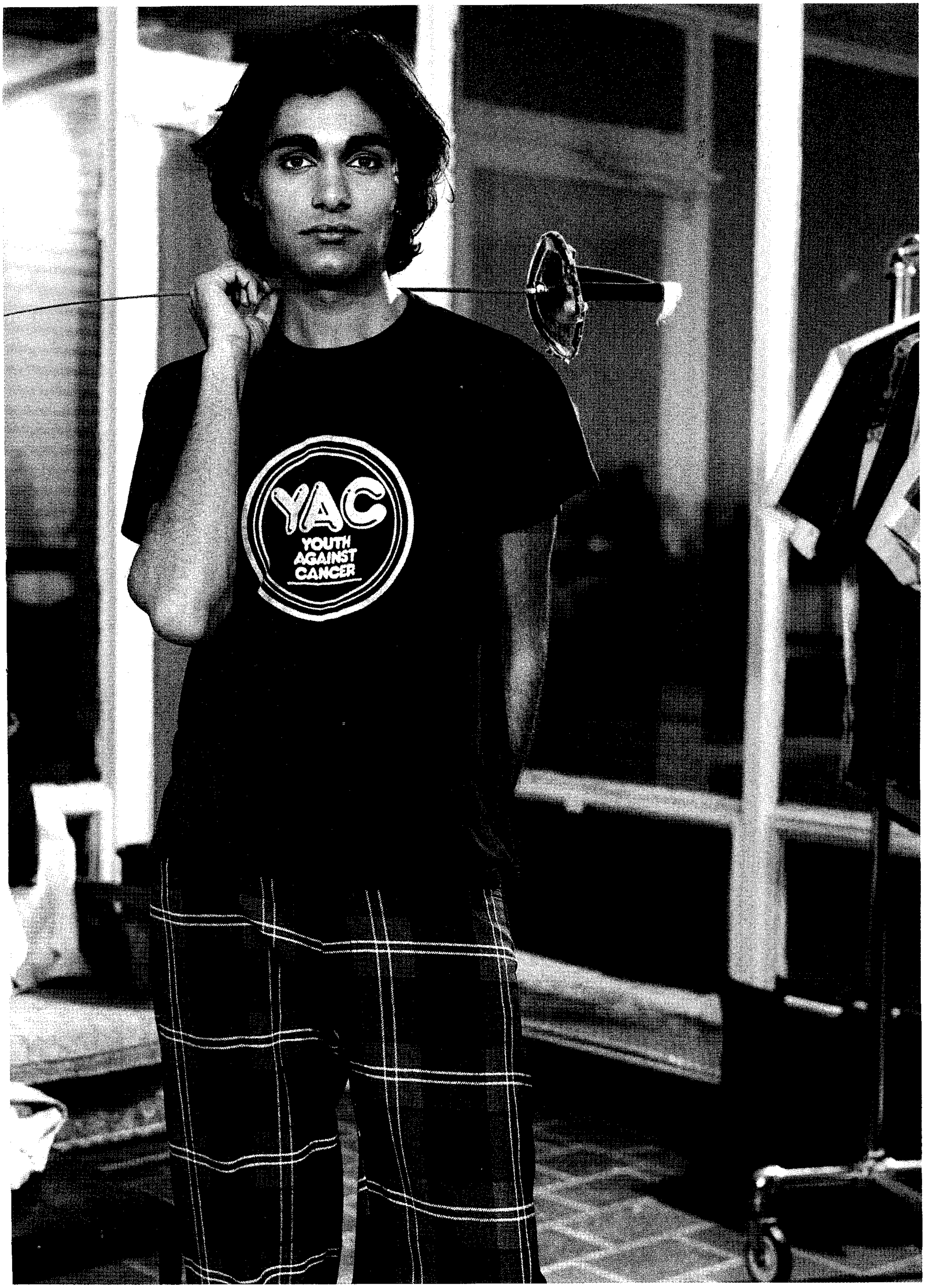
As the rapping continued, it became clear that the best verses—perfectly balanced, with a sense of narrative and a

NEXT GENERATION • SANDY DALAL

When Sandy Dalal, the twenty-three-year-old menswear designer, was a little kid, he travelled with his mother, a fabric scout, to India, where an encounter with the region's exotic textiles made him put away childish things. At fourteen, he accomplished his first sartorial feat—a "goofy" pair of navy cashmere jeans. During his junior year at Penn, where he was a nationally ranked member of the fencing team, he persuaded his Bombay-born parents to let him use his senior year's tuition as seed money for a fashion career. That summer, in 1997, Dalal presented his first full-scale show, an event that prompted praise, and purple prose. (A *Times* fashion writer called him "the newest next big thing.") Soon afterward, the Council of Fashion Designers of America decided to give him the Perry Ellis Award, Seventh Avenue's equivalent of the Heisman Trophy.

At a moment when many designers—Donna Karan, Giorgio Armani, Miuccia Prada, Tommy Hilfiger—are chasing customers young enough to be their children, Dalal sees his ideal clientele as "freethinkers," downtown slackers, and Japanese hipsters. "It's strange what Japanese guys do for personal dress and grooming—they even do their hair," he says, giving his own a worried rake. "My clothes are most at home there." In the five collections that Dalal has shown so far, he has taken what he likes to call "archaic influences"—say, cavalry twill or canvas or waxed cotton—and mixed them with patterns that you might wear to a luau. Eisenhower-era madras shorts become the executive version of a b-boy's low-slung jeans, and Kashmiri paisleys from bankers' ties turn into shirts with sixties swagger. His influences range from a pair of discontinued Nike Air Force Ones to Ralph Lauren ("as a businessman, man"), from polyester relics in an East Village thrift shop to custom-made hand-me-downs from a natty grandfather. "There's no single muse behind it all," he adds. "It's straight-up New York." —Jay Fielden

Photograph by Martin Schoeller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NEXT GENERATION •

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COURTNEY PULITZER

EARLY last fall, when the dot-com doyenne Courtney Pulitzer announced the first installment of Cocktails with Courtney, a monthly soirée for New York's cyber insiders, so many people R.S.V.P.'d that she had to send out a hand-wringing E-mail disinviting most of them. Luckily, nobody held it against her. *Paper* called Pulitzer "cyberspace's answer to Liz Smith," and by this summer her party had become so well known that she got an invitation of her own. At the behest of fun-seeking computer whizzes in Philadelphia, Austin, and Los Angeles, Pulitzer took her production on a cross-country tour, giving the virtual world a forum for schmoozing in the flesh. Bob Wyman, who invented one of the first Web pages, sees Pulitzer not only as a hostess but as an inventor in her own right: "Courtney looked around, saw that the social structure wasn't there, and said, 'What the hell, why not make it a business?' "

When she was twenty-seven, Pulitzer, who comes from a New York branch of the publishing family, started "The Cyber Scene," a giddy on-line gossip column that covered such seemingly humdrum events as I.P.O. celebrations, breakfast forums, and launch parties. Whereas others might have seen business types jockeying for deals, Pulitzer saw "buff" entrepreneurs, "talented suave creatives," and "brilliant" C.E.O.s. Before long, the boldface names in her column started showing up at her party, and corporations like Warner Bros., Hoover's Online, and I.B.M. began shelling out not only for advertising space on her Web site but for the margaritas at her downtown bashes.

As her next move, Pulitzer hopes to take the party to London and Paris, maybe even Tokyo. "I want it to be like in those old movies where you see a war map, and you see all those pushpins on the cities that they're targeting. Only imagine, it's digital now!" she says. —LIESL SCHILLINGER

Photograph by Martin Schoeller

keen ear for internal rhymes that made the lines snap and bounce—belonged to Shanell. Listening to her was like watching a kid hit a tennis ball against a wall for hours and never miss once:

> Rhymin' about your diamonds shinin'
> Nigga, please—I got these.

"You can get an idea from a word or a phrase," she explained. "Like 'cash stacked up in Philly.' Whose cash is it? How did they get it? You can make a whole song off that one line."

She noticed a passing black Ford truck. "Driving across the bridge in your black Ford truck," she began, and almost before the line was fully out of her mouth she had envisioned the rhyme:

> With your hand on the wheel
> While you're feelin' on Luck.

She paused to register the line for future reference. Then her pager went off. The call-back number belonged to a boy she'd met last week in Washington, D.C. She punched in the numbers on her cell phone. When the boy answered, she said softly, "I'll call you after the party. I be home like two or three." Then, in a voice that held hints of the gangsta rapper inside the not totally secure teen-ager, she added, "Don't get bold now. Save your boldness for me."

THE new house in Teaneck is a bluish-gray two-story clapboard on a quiet tree-lined street—in "the *white* part of town," as Shanell was quick to point out. She led Shan and Saleem past an urn of plastic flowers set neatly on the front lawn, and up some brick stairs. At the door, she reminded her visitors to take their shoes off. Then she reviewed the rules of the house: the living room, with its spotless new off-white sofa and chairs, was strictly off-limits, as was the dining room, with its freshly polished table. The guests complimented the new house, and Shanell's mother, Donna Ward, a gentle, round-faced woman in her forties, was pleased. "God bless you," she said. The doorbell rang, and the members of her Wednesday-night Bible-study group filed into the living room in stockinged feet, offering kisses and blessings all around. Shanell and her friends retreated upstairs.

Shanell's bedroom is a small, blue-carpeted room with a black lacquered dresser and a closet full of Iceberg shirts, Coogii knits, at least ten fitted baseball caps, and lots of gear from Phat Farm, the clothing label owned by the former Def Jam president, Russell Simmons. Shanell's stepfather, Kory, poked his head in the door, held out one shoeless foot, wiggled his toes, and nodded in the direction of the Bible-study group downstairs. "I wish I was back in the fucking projects," he said, with mock exasperation, before disappearing back down the hall.

"The green or the black?" Shanell held up two brand-new pairs of Nikes. All the sneakers in her closet are Nikes, thanks to a dinner she recently had with some Nike representatives, one of whom sent her a note: "After you left dinner I said she is special because she has such personality & I am glad to be around to watch you *win* in this game." The green pair got nods of approval. Next, she held up a canary-yellow shirt from Phat Farm. "This shirt looks hot with the blue wife-beater, but will it throw the outfit off?" she said.

Finally, she decided on an outfit from Phat Farm—black stretch jersey, black nylon cargo pants, dark sunglasses, and, for contrast, the green sneakers. "How do I look?" she asked.

"You look like a rapper," Shan said.

NATIONAL RECORDING STUDIOS, on West Forty-second Street, is a place where a great many rap records get made. That night, it was the site of the party for the new Method Man-Redman album. Inside was a smoky crush of Def Jam executives, producers, chain-store buyers, hip-hop writers, interns, assistants, and aspiring rappers, all of whom had come to schmooze, drink free Bacardi, exchange cell-phone numbers, and take advantage of the free buffet. While the new album boomed through trunk-size speakers, Lady Luck, followed by her entourage of Shan, Saleem, and a friend named Kana, moved through the crowd, making sure to greet every Def Jam employee she encountered with hugs or kisses.

When she spotted a tall white man with a close-shaved head who was seated across the room on a metal folding chair and bobbing to the beat, she put on her sunglasses and went over to pay her respects. He was Lyor Cohen, who, before becoming president of Island Def Jam, managed such pioneering eighties rap groups as Run-DMC and the Beastie Boys. He greeted Lady Luck with an inquisitive look, then got up and shouted, "Todd! Todd!" Waving back was the rapper LL Cool J (born James Todd Smith), a sleek, muscular multimillionaire who was discovered by Def Jam at the age of fifteen when he sent the label a homemade tape in the mail. LL Cool J, who is now in his early thirties and is still one of the most popular performers in the business, made his way through the crowd like a movie legend at the Oscars. Lady Luck ran over to him, and when he saw her he stopped, smiled, flexed his biceps, and got his picture taken with Def Jam's newest star.

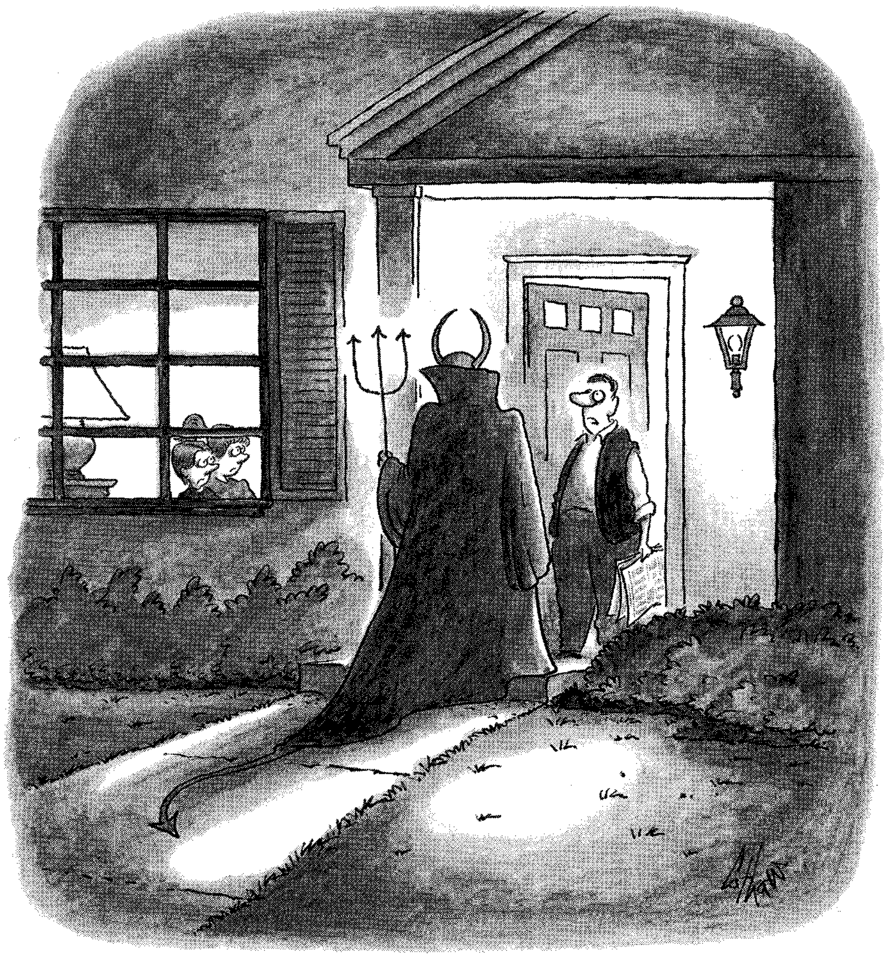
As the party was beginning to break up, Lady Luck headed for the door with Saleem, Shan, and Kana. On her way out, she ran into Russell Simmons. He wore a serene expression, as though he had just stepped out of a long, warm bath after an hour and a half of yoga. "Luck, you getting shit done?" he said.

The question caught Lady Luck off guard. "Nah," she said. "I'm still trying to find some beats."

Simmons stepped back and looked her up and down. Finally, he delivered his verdict: "You gotta get working, yo." Lady Luck nodded mutely and, before she could think of anything to say, Simmons had moved on.

Out on the sidewalk, in front of a long line of limos, four or five would-be young rappers were engaged in a "cipher"—a rhyming battle in which the combatants duke it out with escalating boasts and put-downs. Joining a cipher at an industry event like this one is a way for unknown rappers to get noticed, especially if they can take on—and defeat—a signed artist like Lady Luck. A crowd had formed, making a circle around the rappers, and Lady Luck suddenly found herself in the center of things, standing there in her sunglasses and with a borrowed cigar, still in its wrapper, clamped in her mouth.

"Niggers act niggerish, talk gibberish," a sturdily built black kid in a gray sweatsuit taunted, hoping to draw Lady Luck into battle.



"Thank you, but I've already provided for my children's college education."

Floating from the doorway toward his town car, Kevin Liles took in the scene, then said in Lady Luck's ear, "You ain't got nothing to prove." But Shan did. Luck whispered to Shan, "Spit!" He nodded but didn't move. Finally—and only after the town car, with Liles inside, had pulled away—Shan accepted the challenge. His chin held high, he stepped into the circle and started to rhyme:

I'm not hot,
Nigga, I'm blazing.
Y'all now facing
Shan the Amazing.

He got off a second verse before a challenger stepped into the circle. Someone in the crowd held up a fifty-dollar bill. Shan's opponent spat first. "I shit on you, I shit on your crew," he muttered, stamping around inside the circle. His rhymes were weak, and his voice was barely audible.

"Nah, that ain't it, Money," someone shouted.

When the kid had finished, Shan stepped forward, his baseball shirt flapping in the breeze:

Little-time hustler
Trying to come up on a rise to this game
You a youngster
I can see it in your eyes.
Frontin' like that, you deserve to die.

The opponent stalked around the circle with his chin tucked in, mumbling his verse into the collar of his sweatshirt. His delivery lacked aggression, the thrusting self-confidence that rhyming on a sidewalk in front of fifty or so spectators demands. The crowd pressed in, shouting "Louder! Louder!" By the time the rapper was finished, the mood on the sidewalk had turned to scorn.

"Nobody loves you where you're at, Money!" someone yelled.

"Don't get mad, Money! Don't get mad!"

Shan delivered one last rhyme:

I sit with your chick in my crib,
Gittin' my tip licked while the Knicks is on!

The crowd dissolved and the fifty dollars disappeared, but Shan was feeling triumphant. Lady Luck, however, was not pleased. Sitting in the front seat of the limo that was taking them all back to Teaneck, she rebuked Shan for his reluctance to enter the cipher. "When I tell you to spit, you spit!" she said, turning to glare at her cousin, in the back seat. "It happens once. That one time was Hot 97 for me. You never know when that time is." She felt that she had lost face when Shan didn't obey her immediately, and that he'd missed a great chance to rhyme for Kevin Liles. When Shan didn't respond, she said, as if weary of the whole subject, "Lady Luck don't care. But the question is, are you going to get that one time. Because I'm going to eat regardless."

She asked the driver to pull into a McDonald's at Broadway and 125th Street. After Shan, Saleem, and Kana had gone to get burgers and fries, she said, staring into the darkness below the elevated train tracks, "I'm trying to take everyone with me, but there's a lot of pressure, yo. Niggas don't do what I tell them." She took a breath, then continued, "That thing with Russell freaked me out. He was looking at me real suspect. I want to make Russell Simmons happy, and Kevin Liles happy, and I still don't have the tracks I need. But it's like this joke I have with Kevin, where he says that if I ever write a wack rhyme, or make a wack record, and he hears that shit, he'll drop me off by the side of the road and make me walk home." She set her jaw. "And what I tell Kevin is 'Kevin, I'm never walking home.' "

WITHOUT hot tracks, Lady Luck will never become a star. Behind every rap hit are producers who mine stacks of old soul, rhythm-and-blues, rock, gospel, and classical records for catchy loops that they can layer over a version of the basic drum-and-bass beat that is the backbone of every rap song. Producers like RZA, Prince Paul, Timbaland, Dr. Dre, and Swiss Beatz, who can synthesize fragments of found music into hypnotic mosaics of sound, are stars in their own right—alchemists who can transform ordinary rhymes into platinum hits. At the moment, the producer Lady Luck is pinning her hopes on is Mahogany, the shy young man with the pretty hair and the gold-framed tooth.

Mahogany produced his breakthrough track in an apartment in the South Bronx, where he lives with his mother and his sister. He did his sound mixing on an MPC-2000 sampler, a piece of equipment that cost three thousand dollars and that his mother bought for him with the last of the insurance benefit she received after Mahogany's father died. For the better part of a year, he took his tracks to the offices of Jay-Z's label, Roc-A-Fella Records, where he was greeted without great enthusiasm.

"And then one day Jay-Z walked by and he heard this track," Mahogany told me. "It was called 'Celebration.' I must have given him that track four times, and that one time he was, like, 'Yo, I like this track.' And he must have been in a good mood that day, because he cut me a check right there, from his personal account, for three thousand dollars. And I was on cloud nine." Soon afterward, he sold Jay-Z another track. "I bought some records, a black Maurice Malone bubble coat and a pair of boots to match, and I paid my mom back for the MPC-2000."

In the rear of Mahogany's apartment is a closet-size room filled with CDs, tapes, and thousands of vinyl LPs. Although Mahogany's only credit on Jay-Z's Grammy-winning album was as the producer of a single track—based on the Talking Heads' "Life During Wartime"—it was enough to make him a Grammy winner, too. From that song he stands to make well over a hundred and fifty thousand dollars in publishing royalties, fifty thousand of which he has already received in the form of a music-publishing contract that has allowed him to leave his job, as a salesman at the Gap, and work on his music full time.

"This is my Benz right here," he said, pointing to a fully automated digital mixing board, which he bought with his first royalty payments. "I said, 'Let me get this, and this will help me get the car.' " Next to the mixing board was at least forty thousand dollars' worth of advanced digital electronics, including a Trinity Pro keyboard, decks of TASCAM DATs, a TASCAM CD-burner, a Planet Phat dance-synth module, state-of-the-art samplers, and other equipment that Mahogany uses to chop, cut, loop, and play with bits and pieces of recordings—from Millie Jackson, Thelma Houston, and Fela to Mozart and Philip Glass—which he mines from the thousands of vinyl LPs stacked perilously around the apartment. "I'm looking for weird loops, for unusual sounds," he told me. "The crazier the cover, the older the record, the hotter and the richer the sounds."

On top of the Trinity Pro keyboard were three DATs, containing seventy-five instrumental tracks—the cream of the producer's output over the past six months. "This is a track for Lady Luck," he said, pointing to a fourth DAT, which he loaded into the mixing board. As he turned one of the hundreds of knobs on the board, the room filled with the bouncy opening loop of Donna Summer's "Bad Girls," which Mahogany proceeded to modify in at least a dozen different ways, fiddling with the knobs on the mixing board while loading new drum tracks, toning down the snare, thickening the bass, and reshaping time signatures to create the standard 16-8-16-8-16-8 bar structure of a four-minute rap song. Running up and down the bass line, at appropriate intervals, was Mahogany's signature sound—a fizzy, four-second-long crescendo that suggests a computer-generated version of champagne being poured into a glass.

Mahogany told me that he still had a lot to learn about Lady Luck. "I don't know how good her ear is yet," he said. "I don't know if she's loyal. She's got to want to keep working, and not be content with the first thing she lays down. But, really, she has to be able to listen. I've got to see if she listens to me instead of the people she hangs out with. If I say, 'I don't like it,' she's got to be 'You sure? O.K., let's do it again.' "

AN important step in the grooming of Lady Luck was a guest slot on the remixing of "Get the Fuck Up," a wildly popular underground hit by a young rapper named Pharoahe Monch. The song was to be part of Monch's first album, which would also feature guest appearances by two big-name rappers, Redman and Busta Rhymes. By adding new verses and guest artists to Monch's single, the rapper's label, Rawkus Entertainment, a division of Def Jam, hopes to extend the life of the song until the album's release, in late October. The practice of putting new artists like Lady Luck on tracks with established stars (who enhance their street credibility by associating with an underground hit) is similar to the old Hollywood strategy of launching promising newcomers by casting them in films with a Gable or Cagney.

Fiddling with her platinum four-leaf clover, tugging at her New York Giants football jersey, and sucking on the cap of her pen, Lady Luck was in the Rawkus control room, busily revising the twelve-bar rhyme that she hoped to inject into the remix. Next to her was DJ Enuff, sipping soda from Wendy's and picking at a plate of ketchup-smeared fries.

Beyond the glass wall of the control room stood Pharoahe Monch, a shy-looking, slightly overweight young man in a white T-shirt and baggy jeans. He looked down at the floor as if gathering his strength, then raised his head and started to rhyme:

Rub on your titties!
Yeah, fuck it, I said it,
rub on your titties!

In the control room, the engineer spoke to Monch through a microphone: "I can hear jewelry rattling. Does that bother you?" Monch smiled sweetly and shook his head. Then he put his head down, looked up, and energetically delivered another rhyme:

Some might even say that this song is sexist
Because it's asking girls to rub on they
breast-es . . .

A few minutes later, he stepped out of the booth. "It's like Doctor Banner turning into the Incredible Hulk," he said when I asked him about his ability to contain two such apparently different personalities in one body—one a diffident, mumbling kid from Queens, the other a superhero party rapper whose style gets its explosive strength from letter-perfect enunciation. "Rapping is something I have to do because I'm so introverted," he said. "I was much too shy to rock at the jams. I just stayed in my room and played video games."

I asked Monch what he saw as Lady Luck's contribution to "Get the Fuck Up."

"I'm analytical about my songs," he said. "I analyze Luck being on the song like this: where the chorus was kind of degrading to women, she adds the element that it's all in fun."

In the control room, Lady Luck was conferring with a producer named Bink Dog, a smooth-mannered young man, who played with the rim of his white fishing hat while he talked. His plan was to have Lady Luck join Monch on the opening chorus of "Rub on your titties." Luck frowned. "Yo, that shit will make me sound gay," she objected.

"Better if she say something toward rubbing on her *own* titties," Bink Dog suggested.

"Maybe it *is* a little gay," someone offered.

"Be honest with you, that connotation cuts both ways," Monch said. "But that takes the song to a whole other level."

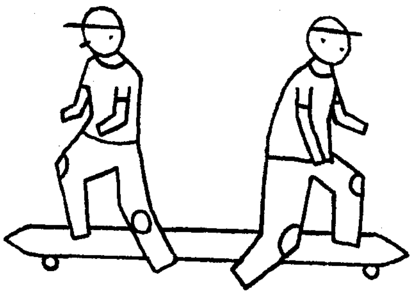
The engineer said that he was just about ready to start recording Lady Luck. To get her energy up, she paced the room, whooped, did a series of high karate-style kicks, and sang bits of harmony from old Bee Gees songs. Finally, stepping outside to the microphone, she started to rhyme:

Bitches in the back like crack getting cut up
I speak on behalf of them broads you
call stuck-up
Act like a man and get cock-smacked the
fuck up.

The point of the verse was that Lady Luck could rhyme as hard as any man. As she punched in the rest of her lyric, her voice expanded with a rush of brash, street-talking self-confidence that brought a smile to DJ Enuff's face:

Luck—
You know the name
Assed-out in the bleachers, stay shitting on
the game.

Lady Luck flipped to another page in her notebook and laid down a second lyric—this one notably devoid of curse words. Then, while Monch, DJ Enuff, and Bink Dog debated the merits of the two verses, she sat with her sneakers off, drinking Tropicana orange juice from the carton. Finally, the elevator door opened and Kevin Liles breezed into the control room, followed by his chauffeur. "That motherfucking record!" he exclaimed as he grabbed hold of Monch. "That shit is running now! That shit is crazy, dawg! Real hip-hop. I *fiend* for that shit!"



He hugged Lady Luck to his chest, then put his hands on her shoulders, took a comic-book step backward, and nodded at the chauffeur.

"I pay him not to give you a ride home if you wack," he said.

He listened to both tracks in silence, then held his ring finger up in the air. "The first one," he said. "She set it off the whole way."

"You want to hear the first one again?" the engineer asked.

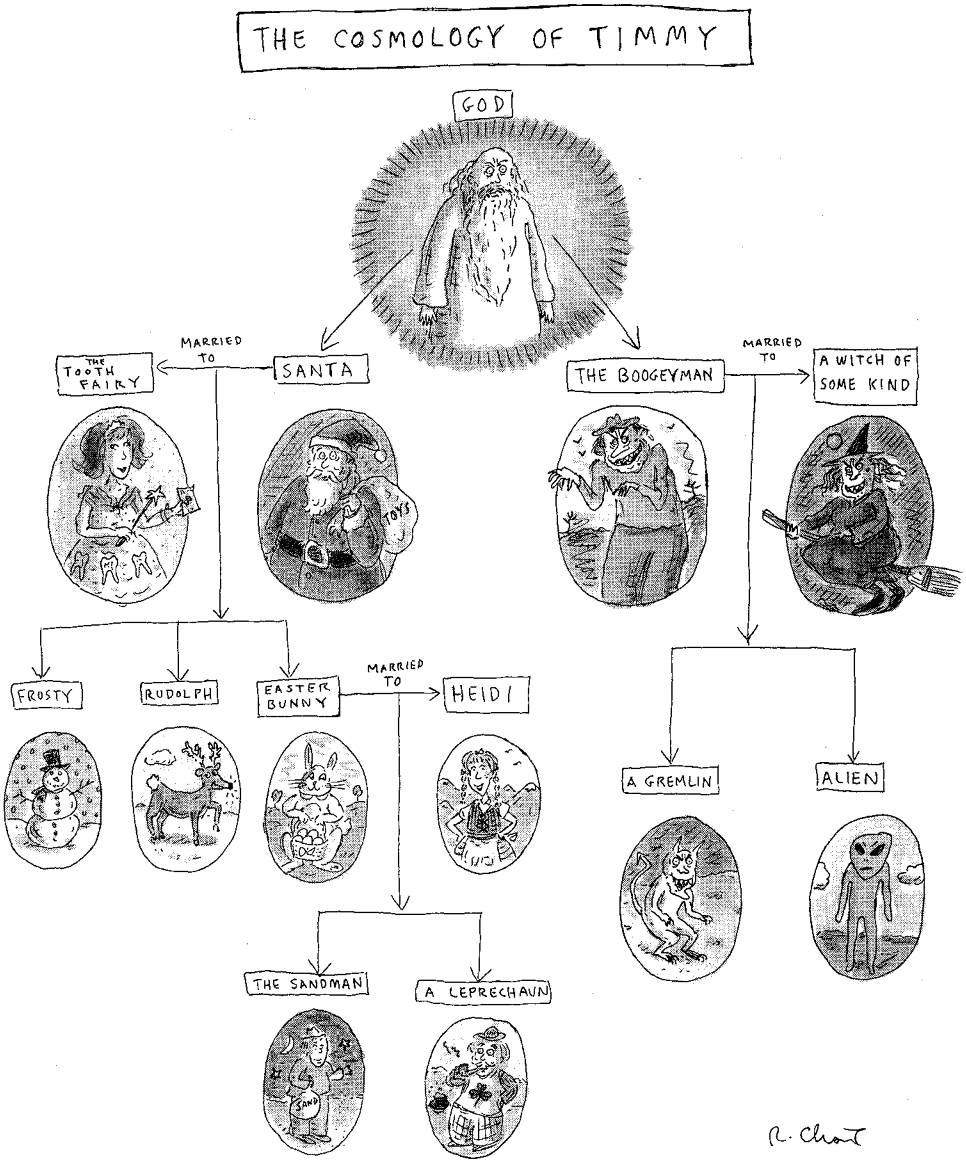
"Yes, ma'am," Kevin Liles said.

"That's the one," he said, when the verse was over. Lady Luck looked momentarily upset. The curse words would disturb her mother, but the decision was out of her hands. On his way out, Liles raised his arm and proclaimed, "May your life be strong and healthy and blessed."

Lady Luck picked up her cell phone and called home. "Mommy, I love you," she said. There was a pause, and—judging by the look that crept over her face—whatever her mother was saying had pulled her out of the character of Lady Luck and back into Shanell Jones. In a small voice, she said, "Remember, this is my rap career. This is paying our bills. No, I'm not saying those words like that." Then, "I love you, Mommy. . . . Please."

THE next morning, Shanell was back in DJ Enuff's office, fresh from her workout with Pop and still bothered by a dream she had had the night before. "There was this girl I was scared of," she said, hugging a pillow to her chest. "She was light-skinned, like me, about my height, and we were friends until the end. We got into an argument, and my heart started beating real fast." Lying in bed, her heart racing and her eyes open, Shanell imagined that she'd heard something move in the hall. She had got out of bed and gone to tell her parents about the dream, but they were both fast asleep. "I got real, real scared," she said. "I turned the TV on, and I slept with that all night."

I suggested that this didn't seem exactly like Lady Luck. "It sounds crazy—talking about me and Lady Luck like two different people," Shanell said. "But Lady Luck is like this really flashy character who just likes to . . . not show off, but she needs to be the center of attention." She nestled her head into the safety of the well-upholstered couch. "Inside Lady Luck's whole body it's ice," she continued. "She's on top. She's arrogant and cocky. Playful. She's wild. Whereas Shanell Jones is like a real loving person—real emotional, real sensitive. You know what I mean? And I try not to get the two confused."



TEANECK HIGH SCHOOL, a dark brick building, serves a multiracial suburban community—white kids, black kids, Hispanics, a few Muslim girls in chadors, and a few boys in yarmulkes from the town's sizable Orthodox Jewish population. Life here comes in subtle shadings, not the bright colors of the cartoon world of Shanell's rhymes. No one sells crack on the street corners of Teaneck.

After weeks of worrying about what to wear on the first day of school, Shanell arrived well before the beginning of classes, in a yellow Phat Farm shirt over baggy Guess jeans and her diamond-studded platinum clover leaf. She had a lot of friends she was looking forward to seeing, especially her "mad cool" best friend, Evan. She took up a perch by a side entrance that is known as the "black door"—a reminder of the de-facto racial segregation that was in place until the nineteen-sixties. Shanell is confident of her reputation for being the sharpest mouth in the school, and she offered a stream of good-natured commentary on the teachers and students passing by. "Yo, that nigga has a crease in his sweatpants!" she exclaimed, sipping from a bottle of Evian. "Yo!" she called out. "You iron your sweatpants for the first day of school?" Her target looked sheepishly away.

She was already, she told me, facing a dilemma: whom she should go with to the senior prom, next spring. "See, Redman and Method Man have promised to take me," she said, referring to a promise that the two rap stars made to her after her guest appearance on their last album. Then she added, "But there's also Evan. We eat meals together. I hear he wants to take me, too."

Seated at a desk in her homeroom, Shanell seemed to be avoiding the eyes of the boy sitting next to her. He turned out to be Evan, a handsome, slightly chubby white kid in a navy-blue Nautica T-shirt and wire-rimmed glasses.

"I hear that someone wants to ask me to the prom," she ventured.

There was a moment of silence before the object of this remark came up with an acceptable answer. "If that was true, and a person did want to take you to the prom," Evan said, "how would you feel about that?"

Shanell looked down at her desk. Living up to the demands of Lady Luck and, at the same time, accommodating the feelings of Shanell Jones was not going to be easy. Arriving at the prom with two of Def Jam's biggest artists was the kind of sweepstakes prize that might be advertised on "Yo! MTV Raps." On the other hand, Evan was her best friend. "I would be cool with that," she finally said. "But listen. I promised Red and Meth that I would go with them."

Evan nodded.

"So what I'd like to do is this. You'll be my date to the prom, but I'll show up with Red and Meth. Is that cool with you?" Her diamond clover glinted under the fluorescent lights.

"That would be cool," he said.

"So this girl comes up to me after math," Shanell said, her face brightening. "You know what she said? She had a dream about me last night. Kids be having dreams about me now. Isn't that just the craziest shit?" ♦

THE WORLD OF BUSINESS

THE KIDS IN THE CONFERENCE ROOM

How McKinsey & Company became the next big step.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

THE University of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1818, "should consist of distinct houses or pavilions, arranged at proper distance on each side of a lawn of a proper breadth." The Lawn, stately and renowned, is still the centerpiece of the university, but some years ago the university was having a hard time getting students to live in the dormitories, in accordance with Jefferson's plans, because the rooms were small and didn't have bathrooms.

Then somebody came up with a brilliant solution: make it an honor to live on the Lawn. The university set up an elaborate process to select the fifty-four most outstanding seniors, and gave them the dormitory rooms on the Lawn as a prize. Sure enough, since then rooms on the Lawn have been the object of an intense competition.

As soon as you move into your room on the Lawn, you may well get a letter from McKinsey & Company, the big management-consulting firm, inviting you to come to a meeting where you will be encouraged to apply for an important-sounding though undefined job called "business analyst." Even if you've never heard of McKinsey, you'll very likely go, partly out of curiosity, partly because it's a free meal and it's flattering to be wooed, but mostly because you have a keen sense that a job at McKinsey after graduation is somehow the functional equivalent of a room on the Lawn. It's the next prestigious thing to get, and desirable simply because it is that.

This process occurs not just in Charlottesville but across the top tier of the most highly selective colleges in the country—at perhaps two dozen schools, including all the Ivy League ones. Management consulting in general and the McKinsey business-analyst program in particular have been the plum post-college jobs of the nineties. McKinsey's looming presence permeates the atmosphere of the last couple of years of undergraduate life, and the first couple of years of postgraduate. If you're not thinking about McKinsey, your friends are.

It is only a small and select subculture of America's youth who are caught up in the world of management consulting. We are not talking here about Goths. We are not talking about residents of hip-hop nation. We are not talking about people who do things in Internet chat rooms that would disturb us deeply, if we knew what they were. We are talking, instead, about the kind of people who, at the moment of birth, scored a perfect ten on their Apgar test (non-parents: a healthiness grade that obstetricians give newborns); and then went on to ace every other organized competition that youth offers, up through college admission; and then continued overachieving to the point that they are outstanding even within their own heavily weeded-out cohort. These are the people whom the management-consulting business wants, and within their world the rise of consulting as a first career move has been dramatic.

The essence of the phenomenon isn't so much the number of graduates who actually become consultants as the size of the psychic space that consulting occupies at Ivy League schools. The general feeling is that in all the big wide world there are only two default fields of endeavor, as far as postgraduate employment is concerned: investment banking (ever so slightly fading) and management consulting (on the rise). The leading companies in these two industries make themselves ubiquitous on campuses every fall—people I talked with used words like "blitz," "deluge," and "onslaught" to describe their tactics. They send students letters. They put up posters and take out ads in the student newspapers, which grow fat with recruiting ads. They have outreach programs for minority and gay and lesbian students.

Every élite college's undergraduate career-placement office has become, to a large extent, a clearing house for the recruiting process, operating an elaborate system for getting multiple copies of seniors' résumés out to lists of companies they designate. After that, there is a round of interviewing, during which students sell themselves to the consultants, and then a round of expenses-paid visits to the consultants' offices, and then a round during which the companies sell themselves to the students to whom they've made offers. And then the whole process is repeated. Everyone—students, placement officers, and the staffs of consulting firms—puts an enormous amount of time and effort into this. McKinsey has full-time administrative employees whose job is to manage recruitment between the firm and just one university. Probably an absolute majority of all Ivy League seniors now participate in the recruiting ritual. It dominates senior-year conversation; students find themselves wondering whether there's something wrong with them if they're not interested in consulting and investment banking. Two new companies, WetFeet and Vault, have gone into the business of publishing expensive advisory materials for students going through the interviewing-with-consulting-firms routine. At Harvard, more than a quarter of every senior class—that's four hundred and fifty people—applies for about ten entry-level jobs at McKinsey's archrival, the Boston Consulting Group, a company that surely almost none of the seniors knew existed four years earlier, when they

ISTVAN BANYAI

"Harvard, McKinsey, Harvard Business School. Nothing's gonna go wrong if you take that path," one analyst says.

MY FATHER SHAVING CHARLES DARWIN

As he sinks his backside into the domed
seat of the barber's shop, my father
tips him back like a spaceman to gaze
at the cobwebs whiskered with shavings.

He strokes his fingers through Mr. Darwin's
facial hair and tugs, as you might
an implausible stick-on beard.

Well, what's it to be, lad?
Only a trim, a bit of a tidy-up, says Darwin,
settling into the chair.

My father pulls the clippers
out of their box and flicks the switch.

We'll have you looking like a man
in next to no time, my father mutters over
the Brylcreme. Can't have you looking like a monkey.

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were writing their application essays suffused with intellectual and reformist yearning. Yale recently set up a committee to review the function of its career-placement office, partly in order to assure itself that the seniors were being made aware that there are options in life other than consulting and investment banking; its new director assured me they are aware, offering as proof the statistic that only seventeen per cent of the class of '98 went right into those fields.

The spectacle of career vogues sweeping across the élite young is not new. Being a business analyst at McKinsey, which means that you're a junior-grade gatherer and digester of great draughts of information for use in consulting studies, is the present-day equivalent of working for the C.I.A. in the nineteen-fifties, or the Peace Corps in the sixties, or Ralph Nader in the seventies, or First Boston in the eighties—the job that encapsulates the Zeitgeist of the moment. Its appeal arises partly from business's having become, in the eyes of college seniors, more exciting, central, and valorous than anybody in the university world could have imagined a generation ago. Before that happened, what you were if you wanted to stay on track but didn't have a specific goal was premed or pre-law. But doctors and lawyers have come to seem less glamorous (managed-care wage slaves and "i"-dotters, respectively) as business-people have come to seem more so.

The consulting vogue won't last forever. While it's here, though, it has a couple of features worth noting. The Ivy League schools were not national institutions flooded with applicants until the nineteen-sixties; before then, their students were drawn from a narrow slice of society, so it didn't seem remarkable that their career choices should be narrow, too. (Yale's recently reëxamined undergraduate-placement office didn't even exist until the late sixties.) Now these schools, in the personnel sense, work like a funnel: the students, chosen with fanatical attention to the principles of meritocracy and diversity, come from every possible background and location, only to be sluiced into an amazingly small career channel. This particular career vogue is also remarkable for how much of the propulsive force behind it is the employers' recruiting efforts, rather than impulses arising from within the students themselves. The consulting firms have figured out how to win over the hearts and minds of perfect twenty-one-year-olds, and how to use a big, ambitiously conceived, heavily government-supported national university system as a hiring hall for themselves.

McKinsey & Company was not the first consulting firm (that was Arthur D. Little, founded in 1886, sixty years before McKinsey), and it is not the biggest (that is Arthur Andersen, with seventy thousand employees, compared with ten thousand at McKinsey), but, as a consultant might put it, it has the best brand. A focus group of consulting-firm interviewees to whom the name McKinsey was tossed out for instant associative response might say "network of famous alumni," thinking of Louis Gerstner, of I.B.M.; Harvey Golub, of American Express; Jim Manzi, formerly of Lotus; John Malone, the cable-television czar; Tom Peters, the business guru; or one of the seven governors of the Federal Reserve Board. Or they might say "blue-chip clients" (A.T.&T., Time Warner, General Electric, Oxford University, the Vatican). Or "buttoned-up style." Or "direct access to top management." Or "air of possibly deserved superiority." But probably, being campus interviewees, they'd say "credential-loving."

The man who built McKinsey, Marvin Bower, now in his nineties, was so focussed on hiring graduates of Harvard Business School that McKinsey endowed a Marvin Bower Fellowship program there. Because Bower himself was a graduate of Harvard Law School, he also hired from there. Over the years, McKinsey also began hiring from Ph.D. programs, even in the humanities, and from résumé-enhancing fellowship programs. ("We are the largest employers of Rhodes scholars and Marshall scholars on the planet, outside of the United States government," one McKinsey partner told me.) The hiring through a highly discriminating institutional filter but without reference to exactly what you know makes a good fit with what consulting firms present themselves as doing: they're supposed to provide not so much a skill specific to the work of the client, like the best recipe for roof shingles, as sheer superior brainpower and breadth of vision. That's what makes their services valuable. Why not, then, hire just on the basis of how smart someone is, as long as his smartness has the public, easily communicated validation of a prestigious university's name attached to it? Better the top tier of undergraduates, God knows, than

His beard comes off like sparks on a foundry floor.
Need a pair of goggles for this job, he shouts
above the din. Still, there's nowt like the smooth,
civilized chops of a well-shaved gentleman.

He dreams of shaving the world's heretics clean
of their facial hair—Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx,
Fidel Castro—doing his own little bit for God
and for moral decency. He strops the blade,

it runs in furrows across the man's face,
leaving the glasslike purity that makes my father
want to weep. When the transformation is complete,
he takes off the cape and brushes Mr. Darwin's neck.

My father's eyes are filled with tears, he's done
a good job, he's humming now, the tune of "Jerusalem,"
stroking the shaven jaws of Charles Darwin,
who sits in his chair petrified.

—NEIL ROLLINSON

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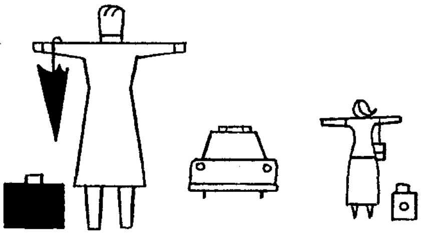
the second tier of business students—this is McKinsey, after all.

Business Analyst Zero was probably a student who, in 1973, was admitted to Harvard Business School and persuaded McKinsey to let him work there for a couple of years beforehand. Over the years, a few more business analysts wandered in, and in 1985 McKinsey set up a program for hiring and training them. Meanwhile, business-analyst programs at other consulting firms—B.C.G., Bain & Company, A.T. Kearney, Andersen, Booz·Allen, Monitor, Marakon Associates, Mercer, and Gemini—were beginning, too. In the nineties, because of inter-firm competition and an over-all boom in the consulting business (McKinsey's revenues are increasing by fifteen per cent a year), the business-analyst programs took off. Before long, the sum of all these companies recruiting like mad at the same few colleges made for quite a stampede.

Here's the rational dimension of the sales pitch that consulting firms make to college seniors: They pay, immediately on graduation from college, with no special training required, between fifty and sixty thousand dollars a year (and often significantly more in the second year). Usually, the programs last two years, after which, if you've done well, the consulting firm will lend you the money to go to business school—and then, if you return to the firm afterward and stay for two more years, the loan will be forgiven. For people who finish college heavily in debt, going to work for a consulting firm is a way to climb out of the hole quickly; and for the colleges, whose high cost is what created the debt, it would seem graceless not to help steer seniors toward financial peace. Consultants don't make quite as much money as investment bankers, but a lot of investment bankers' pay comes in the form of a bonus that may not materialize if the firm has a bad year. You're supposed to have more of a life (though not all that much more) if you go to work for a consulting firm than if you go to work for an investment bank—you're at work until eight or nine or ten every night, instead of eleven or twelve or one, and you get to meet clients, instead of spending all your time locked up in a cubicle running Excel spreadsheets.



Here's the unstated, psychological dimension of the sales pitch: For someone who is intensely ambitious but hasn't yet formed an ambition to do any one particular thing, a consulting job makes an ideal placeholder. It encapsulates that odd upper-meritocratic combination of love of competition, herd mentality, and aversion to risk. "They're very clever about marketing themselves as being for the top people," says Patricia Rose, the director of career services at the University of Pennsylvania. "They talk about the gruelling pace of the work. It's a kind of challenge—'I, too, can pull these all-nighters. I'm tough enough.' There's a little boot camp, a little macho. Do you have what it takes?" To get a business-analyst job at McKinsey is to add another glittering credential to your string, since you've beaten out so many people to get the job, and working there offers the comfort of knowing you'll be among your own kind (applicants have to submit their S.A.T. scores). The world's infinite possibilities haven't been reduced by a whit, only enhanced.

McKINSEY set up interviews for me with a few business analysts, and then I met with some former ones on my own. They were obviously of a type. They were intelligent, idealistic, polite, direct, and nice, brimming as much with evidence of past effort by them and their parents and legions of teachers and instructors as they were with future promise. They looked me in the eye. They projected trustworthiness. They spoke in a sincere and slightly stilted patois. One young man described his choice to go to McKinsey in this way: "Law school was the intended destination immediately following college. When McKinsey came along, it was a very exciting opportunity to defer law school for two years—a two-year departure from the intended path of practicing law." A young woman I interviewed said, "You're always striving to make sure that as many doors are open to you as possible. You strive to do as well as possible so as many possibilities as possible are open to you. And then you repeat the cycle. This is a very nice springboard for whatever you want to do in the future."

The question about McKinsey analysts is whether they were already the McKinsey type before they got there, or were made into the type by McKinsey. It's hard to answer, because if you're a business analyst the McKinsey culture, perhaps by design or perhaps by accident, exactly replicates your run of experiences up to that point. The first thing that happens when you get to McKinsey is that you go to yet another in your life's progression of élite schools—a short-term training program where they sand off whatever rough edges are remaining in your self-presentation while you network with the rest of your business-analyst class. You get videotaped role-playing with mock clients, and then you watch yourself while a coach gives you tips: Keep your hands on the tabletop. Make and maintain eye contact. Don't be confrontational. Don't raise your voice. Keep to the point. Get yourself unobtrusively in control of the rhythm of the encounter.

Then you go to the McKinsey office where you'll be working. McKinsey makes a big point of not having a headquarters; it is supposed to be a global association of equal partners, not a top-down corporation—there are eighty offices in thirty-eight cities, and more staff abroad than in the United States. The biggest office, though, is in New York City, taking up a good portion of a silver mirrored-glass skyscraper on East Fifty-second Street, in midtown Manhattan. In the reception area there are leather-bound copies of McKinsey publications and flattering articles about the company. It feels solid, substantial, almost scholarly. There is an impressively large library called the R. & I. department (that's for research and information). You meet your colleagues, you're installed in a small office, you buy some suits (but don't wear them when you work with Silicon Valley clients!), and, suddenly, you've become a hybrid of grad student and executive—in a modern skyscraper.

Life at McKinsey revolves around "engagements," which is what consulting jobs for clients are called. You are assigned to an engagement team of four or five or six people, and then, typically, you go out on the road. The routine is: Get on a plane with the rest of the team on Monday morning, fly out to Pittsburgh or Wilmington or Charlotte or wherever the client's headquarters is, check into a hotel, and set up a "team room" at the client's office.

NEXT GENERATION

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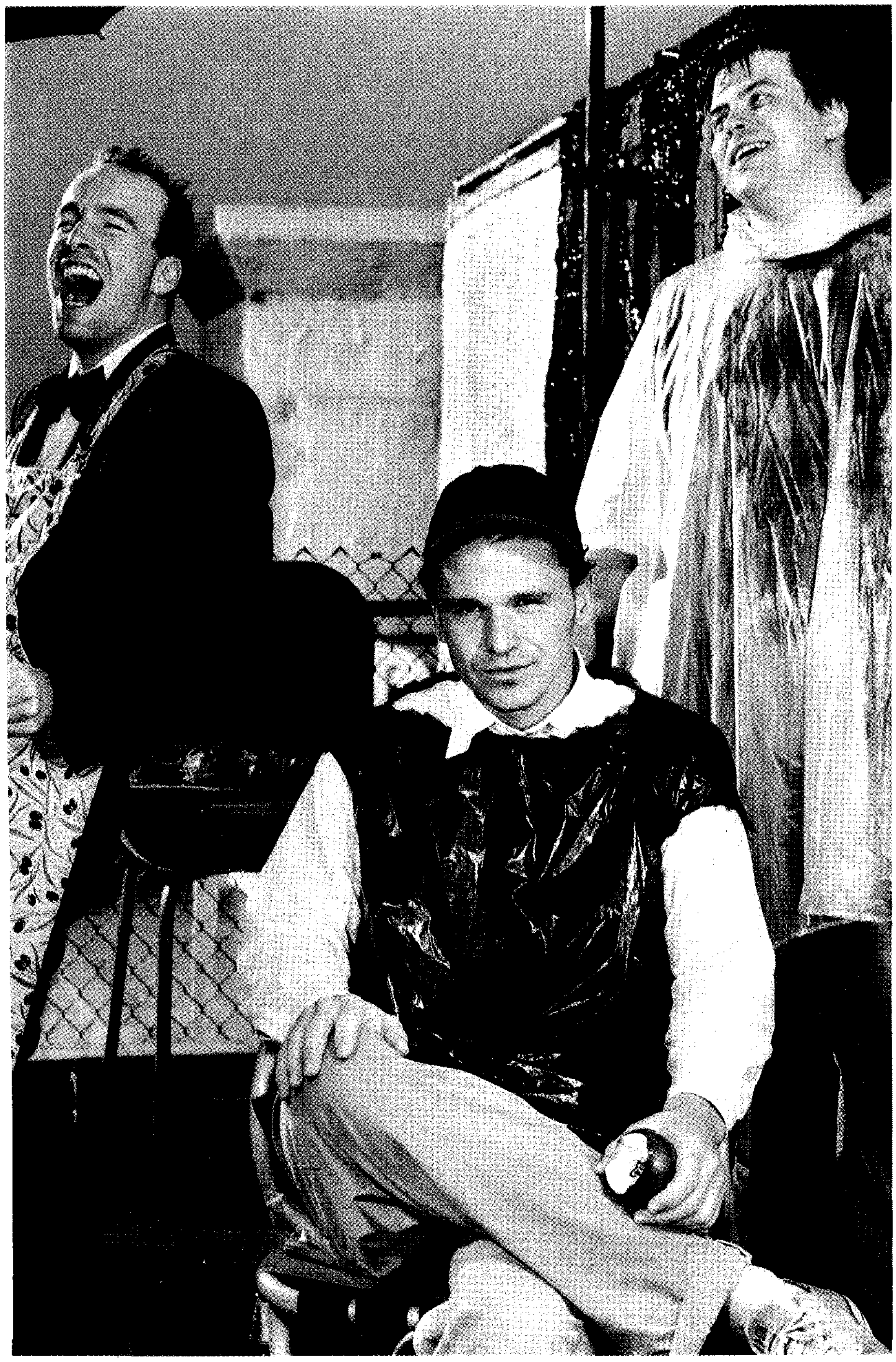
McSWEENEY'S

ICE ICE BABY

DAVE EGGERS, the editor of the new literary quarterly *McSweeney's*, has a simple philosophy: "I try to make the magazine as untimely and irrelevant as possible." The result is a deeply intelligent publication that offers a mixture of playful post-modern fiction and quirky reported pieces. *McSweeney's* makes no promise to come out regularly, but with each of the three issues to date the attention paid to it has grown. "It's one of the most exciting new magazines of the last twenty years," says the novelist Rick Moody, who has had work in Nos. 1 and 3. "It suggests that some of the older quarterlies might be ready for euthanasia."

Eggers, now twenty-nine, was the editor of *Might*, a San Francisco-based Gen X magazine, before taking a job at *Esquire* two years ago. Working at a mainstream magazine turned out to be too confining for him; with *Esquire's* phones and fax machines at his disposal, he began soliciting contributions from writers, and two weeks after resigning he put out the first issue of *McSweeney's*. (Eggers, seated at right, has since expanded his staff of one to include, from left, Todd



Pruzan, associate editor; Diane Vadino, editorial assistant; Sean Wilsey, editor at large; and Kevin Shay, Web master.)

Beautifully bound on heavy paper and adorned with Eggers's own line drawings and occult designs, *McSweeney's* is printed in Iceland, for "no known reason," the editor says. "We just liked the idea." Although all the writers and staff members donate their work, *McSweeney's* consumes money. For one brief moment, however, it was flush. Last spring, the magazine hosted a night of drinking and literary readings, at which five hundred people paid five dollars to get in. And then a very *McSweeney's*-ish thing happened. Eggers stowed the take in his backpack, which he ended up leaving in a cab. Much like a good *McSweeney's* story, the incident moves you to philosophical inquiry: Somewhere out there is another wonderful new quarterly, this one rolling in dough that the editor found in a cab. He pays himself and his talented writers the big bucks for their excellent work.

—D. T. Max

SABA

Photograph by Martin Schoeller

Even though you've figured out that you must always maintain the cool, unperturbed McKinsey style, underneath it there is an inner swagger that is the secret psychological contentment of life on an engagement. Where are your college friends right now? Are they flying around the country, staying in hotels, taking meetings? Probably not. Are they practically living with incredibly brilliant and seasoned senior people who impart their hard-won wisdom all through the workday? Sharing every meal, going to the health club together, maybe sneaking out to the batting cages once in a while just for fun, or celebrating the end of the week with a dinner at the nice restaurant in town? Do they, in other words, belong to a SWAT team of business philosopher-kings, instead of just being scruffy twenty-two-year-old kids? Don't think so.

During recruiting season back on campus, when things got down to the competitive nub, the people from the investment banks used to tell you that if you went to work for a consulting firm you'd be spending your time on such grisly exercises as compiling lists of people who will lose their jobs in downsizing programs, or cutting pension benefits, or counting the cars in competitors' parking lots. But it's not like that! (Not that often, anyway.) The clients are people who live a different life, who have a different education—who, frankly, are of a slightly different class from the members of a McKinsey engagement team. They've always worked at the client and they go home to their families at five o'clock. They're, you know, great people, but they're not absolutely up on the latest financial-control systems and strategic thinking and marketing data. They are deeply rooted in the day-to-day of operating their division, but you—you have the ability to fly in, design a system, and then fly somewhere else and design another one. That's why the C.E.O. brought you in.

THE usual McKinsey engagement is advising a company on whether to enter a new business or a new territory. Should BigWest Bancorporation begin to offer on-line accounts? Should it buy out LittleWest Savings in the neighboring state? Most of the people at the client's headquarters may not know exactly why you're there—they merely know that half a dozen people from the famously arrogant McKinsey have taken over the fourth-floor conference room and are working in there with the door closed. You know what they're thinking: that it's a cost-cutting engagement. And, if it is, you never get past the original suspicion.

The first time that you go into the offices of the client's people and interview them about the reputation of Little-West Savings, or ask them for reports on their competitors' on-line banking programs, or (especially!) ask them what they do all day, you get resentment. In training, they told you to expect that, and how to deal with it. You say, respectfully but firmly, "Look, I may not personally have experience in banking, but I know how to analyze problems in a business context. I would hope you would have the consideration to help me out with it." In the short run, they don't have much choice but to crumple, in a dignity-retaining way. And over time you think you notice them developing a grudging respect for you. They can see that you're already in your team room when they get to work, and that you're still there when they go home. They must have some idea of what kind of pressure you have to perform under. They seem genuinely grateful for what you tell them in the regular progress reviews. Every once in a while, as the three months of a typical engagement wear on, one of them might even invite you over to dinner.

On Thursday night, you fly home—it's McKinsey policy that all employees return to the office on Fridays, which gives a final, tightening squeeze to the acculturative bond that was building up all week on the road. Whew! You answer your mail. You go to a company lunch where there might be a presentation by a partner, you run numbers, you dig up research, you work late (since all your friends are business analysts at one company or another, if you left work early there would be nobody to see anyway). Even though you are no longer physically at the client's, you are still, in your head, deep within the engagement—still business analyzing.

In truth, a lot of what you do isn't all that complicated—it's phoning around in search of basic market or industry or demographic information, conducting what-if exercises with numbers on a computer (. . . and if Brazil raises interest rates by two points what does that do to profitability?), and trying to learn a bit about the activities of the client's competitors. You are a twenty-two-year-old business analyst, after all, not a neurosurgeon. Still, you have the distinct feeling that, just as the recruiters promised, you are learning something at McKinsey that most people don't know, and that is somehow the key to understanding the world.

What is it? It's not exactly the method of intellectual inquiry you were taught in college, where you have the luxury of operating slowly and thoroughly—but it is a method and it does feel intellectual. Clients want McKinsey to help them make complicated decisions quickly. You learn how to "structure the problem": build a "logic tree" containing all of what you need to know in sequential order, figure out what information is missing, parcel out the getting of it to members of the engagement team. Consulting is full of "80-20 rules"—you try to get eighty per cent of the way to the decision based on twenty per cent of the information, or you get eighty per cent of the information in twenty per cent of the time it would take to get all of it. Either way, the point is to save time. So you make hypotheses and test them, rather than just doing research at leisure.

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"You look sensational!"

All the endless hours of work on an engagement, all the research, all the applied intelligence, will go into a "deck," a stack of bullet-pointed presentation sheets that you prepare on your computer, using the PowerPoint program. The aim of an engagement is not to give the client reading material, it's to reduce the issue to its pulsing essence. The client team comes into the room, you distribute the deck, and, crisply, calmly, rationally, brilliantly, you make your "clunk points," marching through them inexorably to the one unerring strategic conclusion. The client will try to flip through the deck—it's human nature. But McKinsey people are trained to deal with this problem. You keep the client locked into eye contact, and you work little guiding phrases into the presentation: "In a minute we'll examine, on page 4, the competitive situation in the Brazilian market, but right now I'd like to direct your attention to the third point on page 2." "Do you need to go back to page 1? I'd be happy to review it." The moment of pure gold comes when you, the business analyst, are called upon, briefly, to present a page or two of the deck.

All of life, it turns out, is unbelievably reducible to the McKinsey treatment: the structure, the logic tree, the bullet points, the deck. One former business analyst told me he reads the paper every morning and finds himself thinking, Hmm, Russia's falling apart; let's pretend it's an engagement. . . . Why not? The McKinsey method isn't merely about business, it's about making the chaos of the world yield itself to the intelligent and disciplined mind. You've been trained and selected over and over for all your life, and this is the payoff: at last, you can do something, you have an omni-applicable power to figure stuff out and explain it to people. In truth, it is more a simulacrum of intellectual mastery than intellectual mastery itself, but what's more important is how it feels. It feels as if you'd been given a key that opens up everything.

Several times in my interviews with business analysts, I spotted the person peeking at a legal pad on which were written a series of bullet points, and then he'd try to find an opening in the interview to launch into the three (or four, or five) reasons that he had chosen to come to McKinsey—"the training" always ranking high, the pay never mentioned. If I tried to take the conversation in a different direction while being presented to, it would be politely suggested to me that perhaps it would be more useful if we went through all the reasons first and then discussed them. A former business analyst, whom I interviewed in a hotel where she was staying, told me that when she'd checked in she hadn't been given the room she wanted, so, thanks to McKinsey, she asked to see the manager and gave him a little talk about how doing things like this would inevitably erode the hotel's brand. *Bingo,* new room.

As if the company you keep, the round of activities, and the method weren't enough to maintain the meritocratic vibe at McKinsey at full pitch, you also, as a business analyst, get incessantly assessed and graded in a way that recapitulates the essential psychological experience of your life thus far. After the completion of every engagement, you get an E.P.R., or "engagement progress report"—it's a McKinsey report card. The E.P.R. is divided into five sections: Problem Solving, Managing, Communications, Teamwork, and Client Relations. Then each section is divided into subsections, such as (in the case of Problem Solving) Issue Identification, Problem Structuring, Analytical Skills, and Developing Recommendations. In every category, you are graded on a zero-to-three scale. Then you go over the report with your E.M. (engagement manager) and your E.D. (engagement director) and sign the E.P.R., whereupon it is sent to your D.G.L. (development group leader), who supervises a small group of business analysts and gives periodic written evaluations. And, if you should choose to enter a long-term career with McKinsey, there will be a series of similar evaluations followed by promotion—or denial of promotion, in which case you leave—up the ladder from associate to partner to, finally, for one of every ten entering associates, senior partner.

"I like to think that each generation will need a little less therapy than the generation before."

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THAT élite universities are now preparing people to go directly into business is not just the trend of the moment, though it certainly is that, but also a departure from a long historical tradition (if they had a function beyond pure scholarship, it was to train statesmen, and maybe ministers, doctors, and lawyers as well). One reason law school was until the eighties the leading placeholder thing to do after graduation is that it represented business at a remove, business as scholarship, not business itself. It is remarkable how rapidly the ancient prejudice of educated élites against business has disappeared, not just in the United States but all over the world, including places where it was much more deeply ingrained than here. Rajat Gupta, the head of McKinsey, a man whose air of intense calm, quiet, and unobtrusiveness is almost unsettling because it counterposes so dramatically with what a big shot he is, told me that McKinsey now can get the top graduates of the top universities in every country to come to work for it. "It took a long time in Japan to crack the meritocratic élite," he said. "A long time in France. We used to be voted the best employer in every country where we operate—in business. That was way back when. But now we're by far the most attractive employer, period, for the meritocratic élite."

If you're over a certain age, it is inescapably jarring to hear bright young Ivy

Leaguers talk about business as cool—Of course! How could anyone have ever thought otherwise?—in a way that lacks the old familiar note of cynical-ironic detachment. These are idealistic people, too. Several of them spoke with obvious sincerity about wanting to use their McKinsey training to launch careers in charitable organizations, since they need strategies as much as corporations do. It was the idea of public life as the most exciting, central, vital place to be, the place where you can, as they say in application essays, "make a difference," that just didn't seem to have crossed their minds. I got a blank look when I brought it up. One business analyst, when I put the question to her, said, "Everybody wants to change the world. Everybody wants to leave their mark. The question is on what scale. We believe McKinsey is a way to change the world. I think it's less political action than interpersonal action that changes things."

But if the old disrepute of business in élite universities is now suddenly gone, then why shouldn't young graduates just go all the way, and work in actual companies instead of consulting firms and investment banks? Not just any companies, of course—companies with a hothouse aura of prestige, super-smartness, and cultural centrality, which is to say, right now, new Internet companies. You can't pick up a magazine and not come upon a picture of a crowd of young hot shots in polo shirts, projecting attitude in a way that McKinsey consultants aren't allowed to, standing in the office of their converted warehouse space waiting for their I.P.O. money to roll in. At McKinsey, because it is a partnership with no publicly owned stock, you can never make millions of dollars overnight.

Already there are signs that Internet startups have begun to pull in some of the talent that would have gone to McKinsey a year or two ago. Jeff Bezos, of Amazon.com, is himself a former junior employee at an investment bank, D. E. Shaw & Company, which is famous for its McKinsey-like hiring policies. Bet he's glad he made the switch! Rajat Gupta told me that McKinsey's annual turnover rate has gone up from seventeen per cent to twenty per cent in the last five years, partly because of personnel raiding by technology companies. So this may be the slightly-past-ripe moment of the consulting vogue.

Or maybe not. When the period of every Internet startup looking like a home run ends, technology will begin to look, to Ivy League seniors, risky—really risky, not just acknowledged-as-a-grace-note risky. These people have excelled in structured environments and have worked their way into a position in which, even though they're just at the outset of life, they can have a pretty well-assured future as long as they do one of a few select things. Maybe the leap from graduate school to McKinsey will turn out to be culturally a lot easier than the leap into beginning adulthood with a roll of the dice. A former business analyst who believes this theory said, "Don't underestimate how conservative these people are. These are the people who stayed home and did their homework. They went to the Ivy League because it's the brand name. They want to assure their future for decades. One guy described it to me as 'the blue-chip path.' Harvard, McKinsey, Harvard Business School. Nothing's gonna go wrong if you take that path."

In any event, something important will have happened. Let me just summarize it for you:

- The United States will have decided, in effect, to devote its top academic talent to the project of streamlining the operations of big business. This is a new development in the history of Western culture.
- We will have created a direct hiring track from élite colleges into a particular sector of the economy. This will only intensify the already considerable hysteria over college admissions, by giving it a hard rational basis for the first time: if you don't get into the right college, you still have another shot at graduate school, but you'll never be a business analyst.
- McKinsey and the other management consultants will have got a great deal. They stand at the end of a huge system that sends tens of millions of people to American public schools every year, administers the S.A.T. to two million people, and processes more than a hundred thousand applicants to the Ivy League colleges—all of this done either directly by government or by nonprofit organizations subsidized by government—and then they pluck its very ripest fruit. Have I made that clear? I'd be happy to review it. ♦

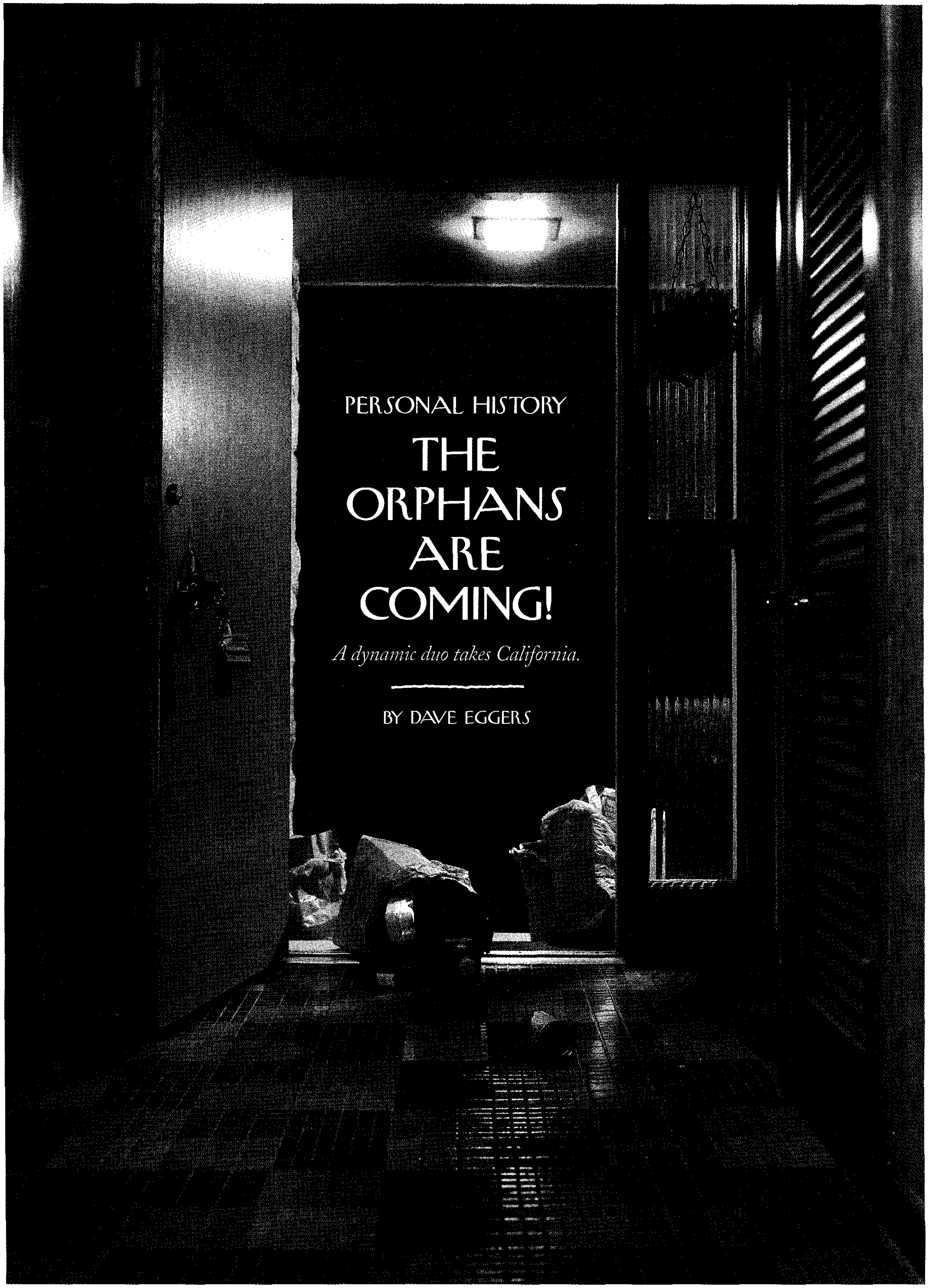
NEXT GENERATION

To Italian soccer fans, the eleven-year-old Vincenzo Sarno is known as "the little Maradona"—a nickname that carries giant expectations. Vincenzo was discovered last December at a tournament in Naples, where his balletic ball-handling won him recognition as his home town's top player. Soon afterward, scouts from several European professional teams—which are increasingly brazen about recruiting young players as a means of obtaining cheap, trainable talent—began looking for a way to lure the boy to their clubs without breaking the law. (In Italy, a player must be sixteen before he can sign a *contratto da professionista.*) Torino, a Piedmontese team, which had been negotiating privately with Vincenzo's father, struck first. Il Toro, as the team is known, would move the family to Torino, help the father find work there, and pay out a bonus of sixty-five thousand dollars; in return, the team would get to coach Vincenzo at its headquarters and draft him when he came of age. Not long after news of the plan came out, European sports pages swelled with operatic outrage—the team was accused of "soccer pedophilia," the father of selling his son's soul—and Vincenzo decided to postpone his Torino training.

On a recent Saturday morning, under the shadow of Mt. Vesuvius, "the *bambino* of God" and his teammates were barrelling about a fake-turf field, dribbling and passing; invariably, whenever Sarno got the ball he broke free and fired it into the back of the net. "In a few years, he will be the greatest international player," Gaetano Mosca, the head of Vincenzo's soccer academy, said. A whistle blew. Pulling on a bright-orange track suit with "Very Valentino" emblazoned across the chest, Sarno sat down on the sideline and dug into a bag of potato chips. It didn't seem like the ideal snack for an athlete in training. "But these are with cheese," he said. —M. R.

Photograph by Michael Roberts

• VINCENZO SARNO



PERSONAL HISTORY

THE ORPHANS ARE COMING!

A dynamic duo takes California.

BY DAVE EGGERS

CAN you see us—Toph and me—in our little red car? Picture us from above, as if you were flying above us, in, say, a helicopter, or on the back of a bird, as our car hurtles, low to the ground, straining on the slow upward trajectory but still at sixty, sixty-five, around the relentless, sometimes ridiculous bends of Highway 1. Look at us, goddammit, the two of us greedily cartwheeling toward everything we are owed. Every day we are collecting on what's coming to us, what we deserve, with interest—we are owed, goddammit—and we are expecting everything, everything.

THE UNSPOKEN MAGIC OF PARENTAL DISAPPEARANCE

IT is every child's and teen's dream—sometimes born of bitterness, often self-pity. Sometimes one wants attention, a sort of revenge. The point is everyone at one time or another daydreams about their parents dying, and about what it would be like to be an orphan, like Annie or Pippi Longstocking or, more recently, the gorgeous, tragic naïfs of "Party of Five." One pictures, in place of the love perhaps unpredictably given and more often withheld by one's parents, that, in their absence, love and attention would be lavished upon one by others, that the townspeople, one's relatives, one's friends and teachers would suddenly be swept up in sympathy and fascination for the orphan child, that his or her life would be one of celebrity mixed with pathos, fame sprung from tragedy—the best kind, by far. Most daydream it. Some live it. And I can say from experience that as it was in "Pippi," so it is in real life. Thus, an incomparable loss begets both constant struggle and heart-hardening, but also some unimpeachable rewards, starting with a freedom that is nearly absolute. And though it seems inconceivable to lose both parents in the space of thirty-two days (there was that line from "The Imp. of Being Earnest": "To lose one parent, Mr. Worthing, may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness"), and to lose them to completely different diseases—cancer, sure, but different enough, in terms of location, duration, and provenance—that loss is accompanied by an undeniable but of course guilt-inducing sense of mobility, of infinite possibility, having suddenly found oneself in a world with neither floor nor ceiling.

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They took my mother's stomach out in the spring of my junior year of college. There wasn't a lot left to remove—they had already taken out (I would use the medical terms here if I knew them) the rest of it about a year before. Then they tied the [something] to the [something], connected what was left, this part to that, sewed her back up, and replaced the stomach with a tube and a portable external I.V. bag that was kind of cute—it was futuristic-looking, like a synthetic ice pack crossed with those liquid-food pouches engineered for space travel. The doctors hoped that they had removed the offending portion, and set her on a schedule of chemotherapy.

Well.

Half a year later, my father pulled off an incredible sort of trick, a two-parter of remarkable dexterity and will. First, he sat us down, Beth and me—not my older brother, Bill, who was in D.C., and not my younger brother, Toph, downstairs playing Sega—in the family room. Our mother was not there; I cannot remember exactly where she was. So we were there, sitting as far away as possible from the cloud of smoke around him and his cigarette. The conversation, if it had followed the standard procedure for such things, would have included a warmup talk, some talk of things generally, and how what he was about to say was very difficult, et cetera, but we were just settling in, kind of, well, obviously not expecting—

"Your mother's going to die."

That was the first part of the trick. The second part:

Not long after that, my sister Beth awakened early one morning, walked down the stairs, opened the refrigerator, and looked inside—milk, fruit, I.V. bags dated for proper use—then shuffled out to the foyer, and glimpsed, through the weirdly open front door, my father, at the end of the driveway, about ten feet from the street, kneeling, his hands on the ground, fingers extended like roots from a riverbed tree. He had gone to get the newspaper.

He had been falling. His cancer had been diagnosed only a few months before. Now the ambulance. He was admitted. He was supposed to be in for a week or so, getting his strength up, not unusual. A week later, the doctor called, said things were not looking good, that it could be any time. My mother scoffed. She and Beth went in. They sat for a time in his intensive-care suite, rank with cigarette smoke—a concession the doctors were making for the fading man.

"Come back later," he said. "I'm taking a nap."

They drove home. In an hour he was gone.

And that was the second part of the trick, the finale: he had beaten her to it.

"I had a feeling he would try something like that," my mother said.

A few weeks later, she was leaving, too, breathing unevenly, a thousand leagues under the morphine. We sat there, day and night, trading places, Beth and I, with Toph downstairs usually, Beth and I sitting, watching, holding her hot hand, sleeping there, sometimes draped over her, waiting for the near-end, so we could gather and then wait for the end-end. And we began planning. My mother was fifty-one. I was twenty-one. My sister was twenty-three, my brothers twenty-four and seven. We were ready. We were not ready. Our house was sitting on a sinkhole, was being swept into the tornado, was the little train-set model house being tossed around in the howling black funnel. We were weak and tiny. We were Grenada. There were men parachuting from the sky, and we were thinking ahead. Bill would handle all

MICHAEL LEWIS

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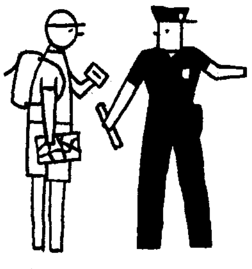
the money, from insurance and the house—otherwise there was nothing saved, nothing really at all. Beth would handle the bills and forms and paperwork, and, because we were the closest in age and it was never really up for debate, Toph would be with me. But first he'd finish third grade. I'd drop some classes and, though whatever number of credits short, go through the graduation ceremony, and we would move to Berkeley—the three of us. Beth would start law school and we'd all set up somewhere near each other, with a view of the bay, close to a park with a basketball court and enough room to run.

We leave Chicago in a blur. We sell most of the stuff in the house, the stuff we don't want to move, have this busy little woman come in, price everything, and tell the appropriate people about it—she apparently has a mailing list of devout shoppers, enthusiasts of possessions of the recently dead—and then we get out of the way.

THE UNMISTAKABLE FEELING ONE GETS, AFTER SOMETHING TRULY WEIRD OR EXTRAORDINARY, OR EXTRAORDINARILY WEIRD, OR WEIRDLY TERRIBLE HAPPENS TO HIM, THAT, IN A WAY, HE HAS BEEN CHOSEN

WE are in California, and the sky out here is bigger than anything we've ever seen—it goes on forever, is visible from every hilltop and every turn. We have a house, a sublet for the summer, that overlooks the world, up in the Berkeley hills, and it's all windows and light and decks, and up here we see everything. We see the Bay Bridge, clunkety; the Richmond Bridge, straight, low; the Golden Gate, red toothpicks and string, the blue between, the blue above—too much view to seem real, but then again nothing really is all that real anymore, we must remember, of course. (Or is it just the opposite? Is everything more real? A*ha*.)



Today Toph and I have nowhere to be so we're on our way to Montara, a beach about half an hour south, and right now we are singing:

> She was alone!
> She never knew!
> [Something something something]!
> Then we touched!
> Then we sang!
> [Something something something]!
> All night!
> All night!

Toph does not know the words, and I know few of the words, but you cannot stop us from singing. I'm trying to get him to do the second "All night" part, with me doing the first part, like:

ME: All night! (*Higher.*)

HIM: All-ll night! (*Slightly lower.*)

I point to him when his part comes, but he just looks at me blankly. I point to the radio, then to him, then to his mouth, but he's still confused, and I guess in a way the gestures look like I want him to eat the radio. But c'mon, he should be able to figure this out. He is not coöperating. Or he could be dense. Maybe he's dense.

Screw it—I go solo. I hit the Steve Perry notes, I do the Steve Perry vibrato. I can do these things because I am an extraordinary singer.

"Can I sing, or what?" I yell.

"What?" he yells.

The windows are open, too.

"I said, 'Can I sing, or what?' "

"No." He smiles. "You can't sing at all."

Though he is often resistant (children so seldom know what is good for them), I have taught him to appreciate all the groundbreaking musicmakers of our time—Big Country, Duran Duran, Loverboy—and he is lucky for it. His brain is my laboratory, my depository. Into it I can stuff the books I choose, the television shows, the movies, my opinion about elected officials, historical events, neighbors, passersby. He is my twenty-four-hour classroom, my captive audience, forced to ingest everything I deem worthwhile. He is a lucky, lucky boy! And no one can stop me.

You cannot stop me from having Toph, who is eight, steer on a straightaway while I take off my sweatshirt be-

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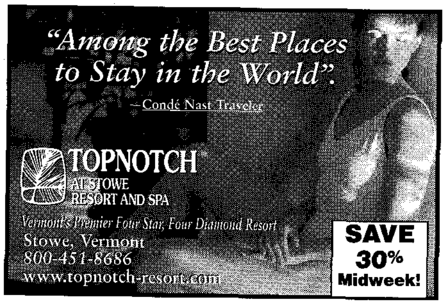
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cause suddenly it's gotten really fucking hot. You cannot stop us from throwing our beef-jerky wrappers on the floor, or leaving our unfolded laundry in the trunk for, hell, eight days now because we have been busy. You cannot stop Toph from leaving a half-full cardboard orange-juice container under the seat, where it will rot and ferment and make the smell in the car intolerable, with that smell's origin remaining elusive for weeks, during which the windows must be kept open at all times, air freshener handy, until finally the container, by now soggy, is found and Toph is buried up to his neck in the back yard and covered in honey—or should be—for his role in the debacle. We cannot be stopped from looking with pity upon all the world's sorry inhabitants, those unblessed by our charms, unchallenged by our trials, unscarred and thus weak, gelatinous. It's unfair. The matchups, Us versus Them (or You), are unfair. We are dangerous. We are daring and immortal.

CALIFORNIA! ALL IS NEW! NO RULES! HA!

ON the way to Montara, I see a sign that says "Nude Beach" and am suddenly reeling with curiosity. I pull over and jump out of the car—

"Is this it?" he asks, meaning Montara.

"Maybe," I say, lost, dizzy—

Is this O.K.? We dart across the street, my brain squabbling. I think this is O.K. *This is not O.K.* This is fine. *This is fine.* We walk to the entrance. A bearded man, sitting on a stool with a gray metal box on his lap, wants ten dollars each to enter.

"Is he ten dollars, too?" I ask, indicating the eight-year-old boy next to me, in a Cal sweatshirt and a Cal baseball hat, worn backward.

"Yes," the bearded man says.

I glance beyond him, down the cliff, trying to catch a glimpse of the beach below. Twenty dollars! For twenty dollars there had better be some very impressive nude women down there—and not just life-drawing-class nude women. *Is this weird?* No, this is O.K. *This is educational. It's natural. We're in California! All is new! No rules!*

I'm almost convinced. I step over to

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the bearded man, out of Toph's earshot.

"So, you know, are kids allowed down there?"

"Of course."

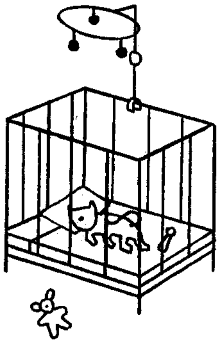
"But is it, like . . . weird?"

"Weird? What would be weird?"

"You know, for a little kid? Is it too much?"

"Too much of what? Of the human *body*?" He says it in a way that's meant to make *me* seem like the freak—he Mr. Natural and me some kind of clothes fascist.

"Never mind," I say.



Stupid beach—probably just a bunch of naked guys with beards, pale, saggy. We run back across the highway, back into the red Civic, and keep driving. At Montara, we throw the Frisbee higher than anyone has thrown one before, so that in the middle of the pale blue there is only the sun's glazed headlight and the tiny white disk, and then it goes farther than anyone has known a Frisbee to go, with us having to use miles of beach, from one cliff to the other, thousands of people in between, to catch it.

We are fantastic, alive, and I will not think yet about everything coming soon, all the things we need to do when school starts and all this becomes real, but I know I have to get a résumé together, and we have to find a new place to live when the sublet ends. And I should work out. I could join a gym. I could get a weight bench. At least some free weights, a few dumbbells. I should. I have to. I have to present to Toph a body exploding with virility, flawless, instilling confidence, dashing doubt. I'll join a gym. I'll start jogging.

But today we're spectacular. We throw so far, and with such accuracy, and with such ridiculous beauty. We look like professionals, like we've been playing together for years. Busty women stop and stare. Senior citizens sit and shake their heads in wonder. Religious people fall to their knees. I mean, can you *see* this?

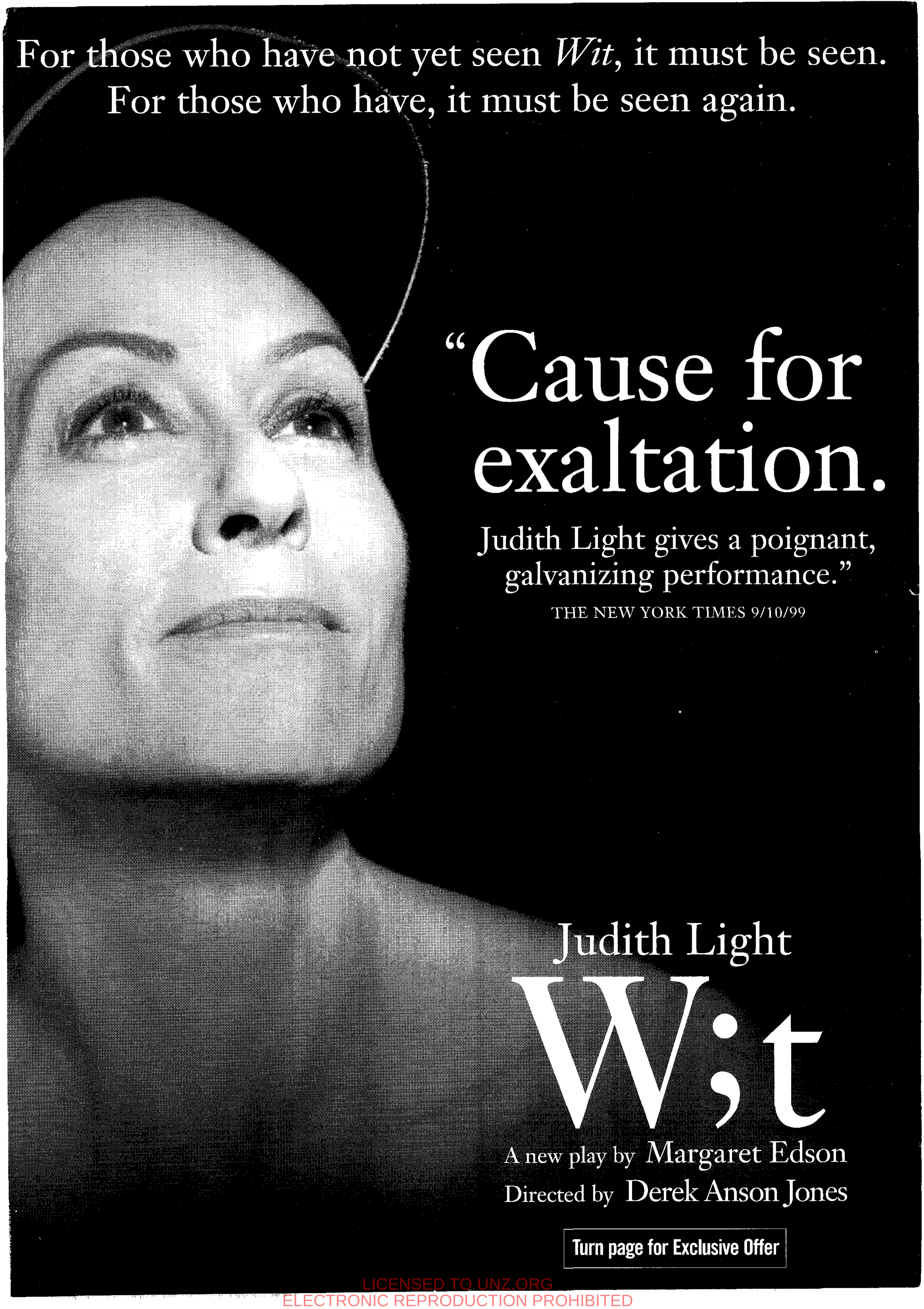
WE have found a school for Toph, a peculiar little private school that has given him what amounts to a full scholarship, even though we could pretty comfortably pay the tuition. But, because we are owed, we take the free ride. Meanwhile, Toph is going to summer camp on the Berkeley campus, run by the university's athletes, and his skills at everything from lacrosse and football to baseball and Frisbee make it obvious that soon enough he will be a three-sport (at least) professional athlete. We predict more scholarships, more gifts spread before us by the embarrassed and sorry world. Beth and I take turns driving him to and fro, down the hill and up again, and otherwise we lose weeks like buttons, like pencils.

In the evening, after camp, is Toph's Little League. Toph's team practices on a field in a pine-surrounded park two blocks up the hill from our sublet, where the view is even more startling. I bring a book to the practices, guessing that watching eight-to-ten-year-olds run drills will be boring, but God no, it's enthralling. I watch every movement, watch them gather around the coach for instructions, shag balls, go to the drinking fountain. I watch Toph field a grounder, watch to see if he's talking with the other kids, if he's getting along, strain to see if he's being accepted. During the drills, I wait for his turn, and when it comes time for him to bare-hand a dribbler or cover second for a 6-4-3 I almost die from the pressure.

Should have had that one.
Good, good, good.
Oh, God, c'MON!

I say nothing, but it's all I can do to avoid making noises. He catches well, can catch anything, really, but why can't the kid hit? *Jesus Christ, that was served up like a fat fucking steak. Hit the ball. Hit that coconut, boy!*

I watch, and the mothers watch. I do not know how to interact with the mothers. *Am I them*? I look over and smile when one of them makes a joke that is laughed at by all. I chuckle—not too much, I don't want to seem overeager—but enough to say "I hear you. I laugh with you. I share in the moment." But to them I'm a temp. A cousin, maybe. The



For those who have not yet seen *Wit*, it must be seen.
For those who have, it must be seen again.
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THEATER REVIEW FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1999

New Lead In 'Wit' Transcends A TV Past

by PETER MARKS

For several years, Judith Light was a star of "Who's the Boss?," a popular sitcom on ABC. The show had a silly, made-for-each-other premise: Ms. Light played a Connecticut advertising executive and single mother who hired Tony Danza as a live-in housekeeper and babysitter for her son.

The program remained on the air long enough to freeze Ms. Light in the minds of viewers as another of those sympathetic creatures of television comedy who thrive on a humdrum diet of glib retorts and artfully raised eyebrows. After the show's cancellation, she graduated to a lucrative servitude in made-for-television movies.

Now Ms. Light, following in the path of Mr. Danza, who appeared on Broadway this year in "The Iceman Cometh," has gravitated back to the theater, and not for the kind of limiting roles she took on in her sitcom days. The play she has been cast in is the pride of last season, "Wit," Margaret Edson's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama, and the assignment she landed was replacing Kathleen Chalfant, who earned praise across the board for her portrayal of a literature professor dying in the oncology unit of a teaching hospital.

This might have been an occasion for cynical theater types to gloat over the error of casting to the requirements of Nielsen families. But it's not. The folly uncovered here is that Ms. Light has avoided the stage for far too long. Her performance as Vivian Bearing, the John Donne scholar struggling to hold on to her dignity as fiercely as the doctors seem eager to suction it away, cuts poignantly close to the bone. It is the sort of transformational work that would hint at other future successes, with Shakespeare, maybe, if a full-time career in the theater were truly an option these days. In any event, it gives rise to a wish. Ms. Light, don't touch that dial again, at least not for a while...

> Her performance as Vivian Bearing cuts poignantly close to the bone.

The cast has changed substantially since "Wit" opened in New York a year ago; the sole holdover in a major role is the outstanding Paula Pizzi, playing an empathic nurse, preparing either for her boards or beatification. Of the new arrivals, William Cain and Sally Parrish provide solid support as Vivian's primary doctor and academic mentor...

All eyes, though, are on Ms. Light, as well they should be. Her conjuring of an unstoppable life force as it draws to a halt is cause for grief, but mostly exaltation. No wonder the lighting designer Michael Chybowski blankets her final exit – one of the great treatments of nudity on a contemporary stage – in ethereal white light. When she departs, it is truly in a blaze of glory.

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Judith Light

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young boyfriend of a divorcée? They don't care.

Fuck it. I don't want to be friends with these women anyway. Why would I care? I am not them. They are the old model and we are the new.

After practice, we walk home, and as we hit our street I inquire, as gently as I possibly can, about his hitting, or lack thereof.

"So why do you suck so much?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe you need a lighter bat."

"You think?"

"Yeah, maybe we'll get a new bat."

"Can we?"

"Yeah, we'll look for a new bat or something."

Then I push him into a bush.

AT HOME, WITH GUSTO

SOMETIMES we sing while we are cooking—regular words, words about pouring the milk or getting the spaghetti sauce, but we sing them opera style. It is tremendous.

And sometimes, while cooking, we have sword fights using wooden spoons or sticks we bring into the house for such occasions. For a while, we would chase each other around the house, mouths full of water, threatening to spit. Of course, neither of us would have ever thought of actually spitting a mouthful of water at the other *inside* the house, until one night when I had him cornered in the kitchen and I just went ahead and did it. Things have been devolving ever since. There is a voice inside me, a very excited, chirpy voice, that urges me to keep things merry, madcap even, the mood buoyant. Because my sister is always pulling out old photo albums, crying, asking Toph how he *feels*, I have to overcompensate by keeping us occupied, making our lives a music video, a game show on Nickelodeon—lots of quick cuts, crazy camera angles, fun, fun, *fun!* It's a campaign of distraction and revisionist history—leaflets dropped behind enemy lines, fireworks, funny dances, magic tricks. *Whassat? Lookie there! Where'd it go?*

Our best trick, though, is to pretend, for the benefit of the neighbors and whoever's around, that I'm beating

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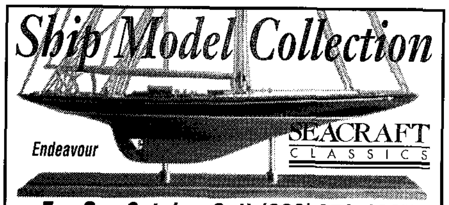

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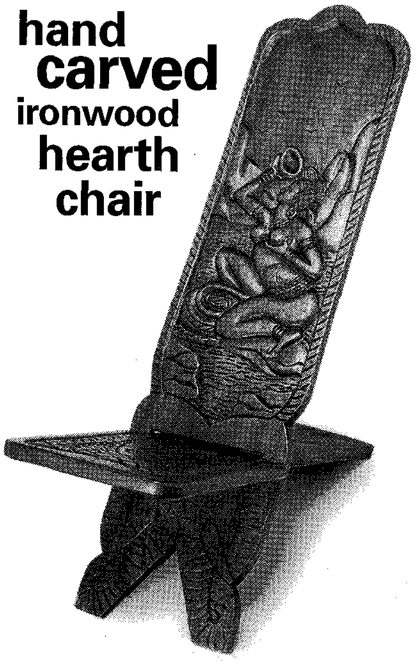

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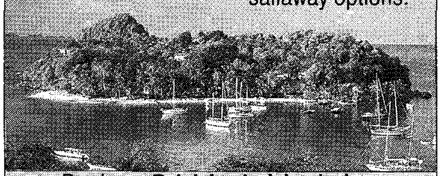

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Toph with a belt. With the back-deck door open, we stand in the living room and then, with the belt buckled into a circle, I yank it quickly on both ends, snapping it taut and making a sound not unlike that which would presumably result from striking Toph's bare legs at full force. When it cracks, Toph squeals like a pig.

BELT: *Whack!*

TOPH: *Squeal!*

ME: How does that feel, kid?

TOPH: I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I'll never do it again!

ME: Yeah? You'll never *walk* again!

BELT: *Whack!*

TOPH: *Squeal!* Etc.

Always the best games have involved some kind of threatened injury or near-accident, as when he was a toddler and I would run around with him on my shoulders, pretending to be dizzy, spinning, stumbling—

In the kitchen, when inspiration strikes, I take out the family's seventeen-inch turkey knife, plant my legs in an A, squat a little, and hold the knife over my head, samurai style.

"Hiyyyyy!" I yell.

"Don't," he says, backing away.

"Hiyyyyy!" I yell, stepping toward him.

"Not funny," he says, backing into the family room.

I put the knife away; it clinks into the silverware drawer.

"Dad used to do that all the time," I say. "Out of the blue. He'd get this look on his face, this bug-eyed look, and act like he was going to split our heads open with the knife."

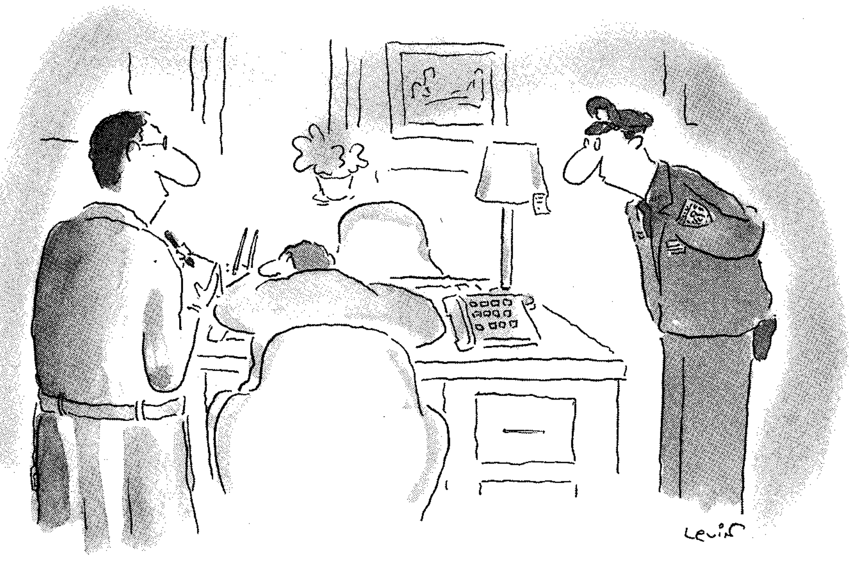
"Sounds funny," he says.

"Yeah, it was funny," I say. "It actually was funny."

ENEMIES LIST, ETC.

The enemies list is growing quickly, unabated. All these people impeding us, trifling with us, not knowing or caring who we are, what has happened. The squirrelly guy who sold Toph that cheap lock for his bike—his new bike, the one we bought last year for his birthday, just before we left Chicago—I wanted to punish that man. He said it was the best lock they had—"invincible, no sweat," he said—and the bike was stolen within the week. And that idiot in the van who backed over our little Civic, with both of us in it, at a stoplight in the middle of Berkeley, me forced to picture the van continuing, monster-truck style, over the hood and onto us, Toph crushed, slowly, me watching, helpless. And the secretary at school, with her blaming look at me when he's late for school. And the owners of the Berkeley hills sublet, who kept our deposit, citing (or claiming) damage to just about everything in the house. And, most of all, those real-estate people. Cruel, vicious, subhuman. Those fuckers were unbelievable.

We had no idea where to look, but after discerning that between my income (assuming that at some point the



"Lieutenant, he left a suicide sticky."

notion would become reality) and Toph's Social Security money (he's entitled to a monthly stipend equivalent to what would have been paid our parents, we presume) we could pay about a thousand dollars a month, we had set out in July to find a place. And were soon sucker-punched by the crude reality of our prospects. There would no longer be hills or views—that sublet was a freak occurrence. Some of the places we saw didn't even have doors on the bedrooms. I felt terrible, personally responsible. I began to look without Toph, to spare him the gore.

In mid-August, desperate, I walked into a small adobe house a few blocks from my sister Beth's new apartment. The house was perfect. Or, rather, it was not at all perfect but was far less imperfect than anything else we'd seen. Toph and I repainted the entire house in one week, with rollers, skipping the corners and the molding, leaving the rooms loose, fuzzy, Rothkoesque. And then it went to shit.

The coffee table is our home's purgatory, the halfway point for everything eaten or worn or broken. It is covered with papers and books, two plastic plates, a half-dozen dirty utensils, and a Styrofoam clam containing French fries that one of us decided were "too thick and squishy" and were thus left uneaten. There are at least four basketballs in the room, eight lacrosse balls, a skateboard, two backpacks, and a suitcase, still partially packed, that hasn't moved in four months. Next to the couch, on the floor, are three glasses that once held milk and now hold its hardened remains.

If we throw and miss the garbage can, the item—usually remnants of a fruit item—stays where it lands until a few weeks later, when someone, most likely Beth, making a big show of how appalled she is, picks it up and throws it out. People worry for us. I worry for us. I worry that any minute someone—the police, a child-welfare agency, a health inspector, someone—will burst in and arrest me, or maybe just make fun of me, shove me around, call me bad names, and then take Toph away, and bring him somewhere where the house is kept clean, where laundry is done properly and frequently, where the parental figure or figures can cook and do so regularly, where there is no running around the house poking each other with sticks.

We scrape through every day blindly, but our relationship, at least in terms of its terms and its rules, is wonderfully flexible. Toph has to do certain things for me because I am his parent, and I have to do certain things for him. Of course, when I am called upon to do something I don't want to do, I do not have to do it, because I am not actually his parent. And when someone has to be blamed for something, like his chronic tardiness at school, he allows me to finger him, and if he resists I only need to look at him that certain way, that way that says, "We are partners here, you little jerk, and yesterday, when I was exhausted, and sick with pinkeye, you wanted to get some of those Magic cards, absolutely had to have them for the next day, because everyone was bringing new cards in to show during lunch, and because I was afraid that you'd be unpopular and would be cast out for being a near-orphan and having funny ears and living in a rental and would grow up with an interest in guns and uniforms, or worse, I got dressed and went to that comics store that's open till eight, and we got two packs of cards and one of them had a hologram in it, and you were the envy of all, and your life continued on its recent course of ease, of convenience, of relative stardom, of charmed bliss"—and he relents.

Sucker.

BY fall, we've settled into something like a schedule. In the morning, a little after I go to bed, Toph wakes up at, say, three or four or four-thirty, so as to allow ten minutes to shower, ten minutes to dress, half an hour to make and eat breakfast and finish his homework, and at least three and a half, four hours for cartoons. At eight-forty-five, he wakes me up. At eight-fifty, he wakes me up again. At eight-fifty-five, he wakes me up one more time, and, while yelling at him because he's late, I drive him to school. I park our little red car in a spot that I have been told, in four separate flyers and one personal note, is

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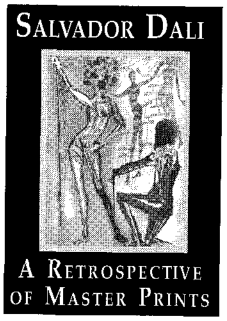
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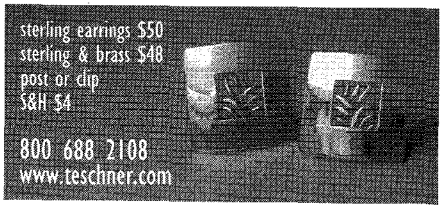
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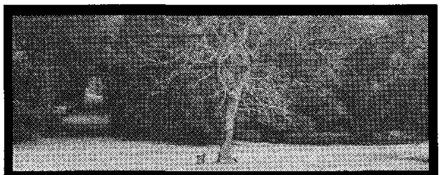

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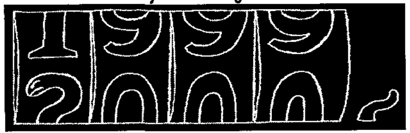

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not to be used for the loading and unloading of children. Then I grab a piece of paper from his backpack and compose a note:

DEAR MS. RICHARDSON,
I am sorry Toph is late this morning. I could make something up about an appointment or a sickness, but the fact is that we woke up late. Go figure.
Best,
Brother of Toph

He has to knock on the school door to get in, and when the door opens the secretary tries to give me the customary dirty look, but now as always I am not watching, cannot see her, no. Toph disappears inside.

I feel horrible and guilty much of the time, know in my heart that, because I do not make him breakfast or get him to school on time, he will grow up bent, angry—will play Myst, then advanced D&D, then learn to skin rabbits and shoot crossbows. But then again, in comparison with some of the other parents, I'm Dr. Spock. His friends' parents are flakier than me, leaving their sons at our house for hours, keeping Toph at theirs much too long, without notifying me. The father of one of his best friends is a world-famous marijuana expert with a house, high in the Oakland hills, littered with paraphernalia and plants.

Beth and I are entertained by the inadequacies of our fellow-parents. She and I are collaborating peacefully, tag-teaming. We are a circus family, a trapeze family, with perfect timing, great showmanship, tight green outfits.

OH, I COULD GO OUT, SURE, BUT NO, NO, NO, NO!

BETH and I are still thinking it's too early to leave Toph with anyone but family, that to do otherwise would cause him to feel unwanted and alone, leading to the warping of his fragile psyche, then to experimentation with inhalants, the joining of some "River's Edge" kind of gang, the drinking of lamb's blood, the inevitable initiation-fulfilling murder of us both, in our sleep.

So I am getting out, once a week tops, maybe once every ten days. When I can get a babysitter, I leave and race into the city, giddy, desperate, to eat with a friend or just to go to a bar where I'll be a little manic, will laugh too much, drink too quickly, hoping for something to happen, to make the night count, make it worth the hassle, the constant worry, the visions—

As I'm backing out of the driveway there is the usual euphoria—*Free!*—which pretty much overtakes me. Often I laugh out loud, giggle, bang the steering wheel a few times, grinning, put the right tape in the stereo—

And just as I'm turning the corner I become convinced, in a flash of pure truth-seeing, that Toph will be killed. Of course. The babysitter was acting peculiar, was too quiet, too unassuming. His eyes had plans. But I ignored the signals. Toph had told me he was weird, repeatedly mentioned his scary laugh, the veggie food he brought and cooked, and I just shrugged it off. Now he will try bad things on Toph. While Toph is sleeping he will do something with wax and rope. The possibilities snap through my head like pedophilia flash cards: handcuffs, floorboards, clown suits, leather, duct tape, knives, bathtubs, refrigerators—

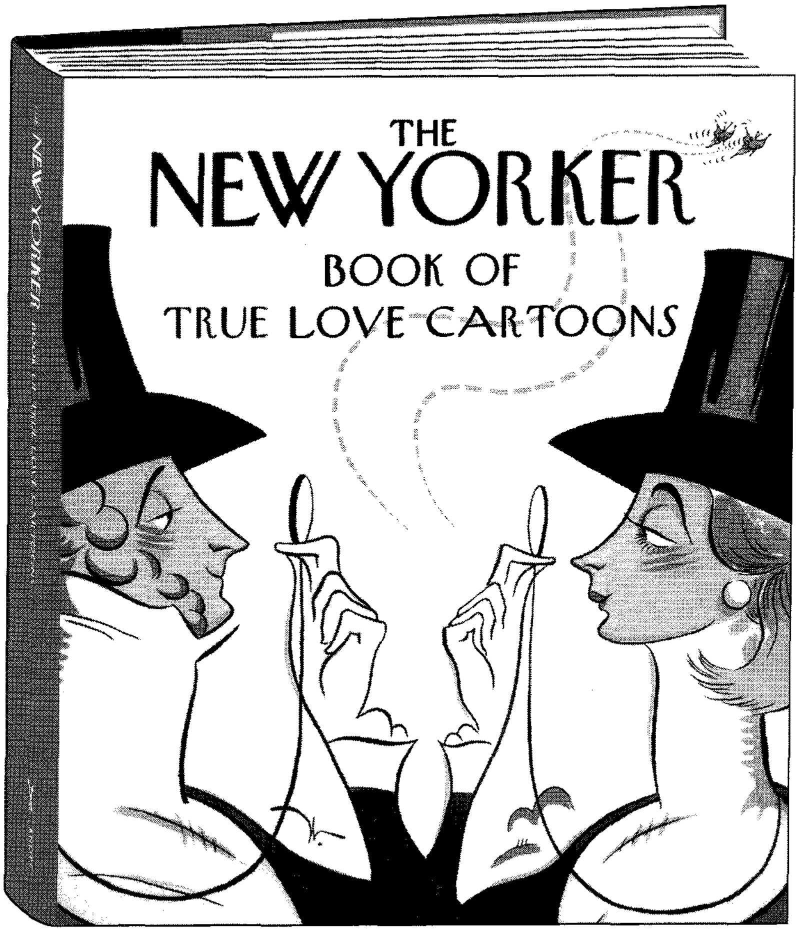
Through the toll, the light, onto the ramp, onto the bridge.

This is risk. This is betrayal.

I have to do this.

IN the brown light of the cavernous bar, I see everyone: Brent, Moodie, Jessica, K.C., Pete, Eric, John—all these people from high school, from before high school, from grade school, earlier, all from Chicago, all just out of school, about fifteen of us living here. It's the manifestation of an inexplicable sort of mass migration, with more of us landing in San Francisco every month, all for different reasons, for no particular reason. Certainly no one has come to take advantage of the job market, which is anything but enticing. For now, we're all scraping by with temping, with anything. Jessica is nannying in Santa Rosa; K.C. teaches sixth grade at a Catholic girls' school; Eric's in grad school at Stanford; and Pete, as part of some dubious Jesuit volunteer corps (cult?), is living with a half-dozen other conscripts in Sacramento, where he works for the Prisoners' Rights Union, editing a popu-

What's funny about true love?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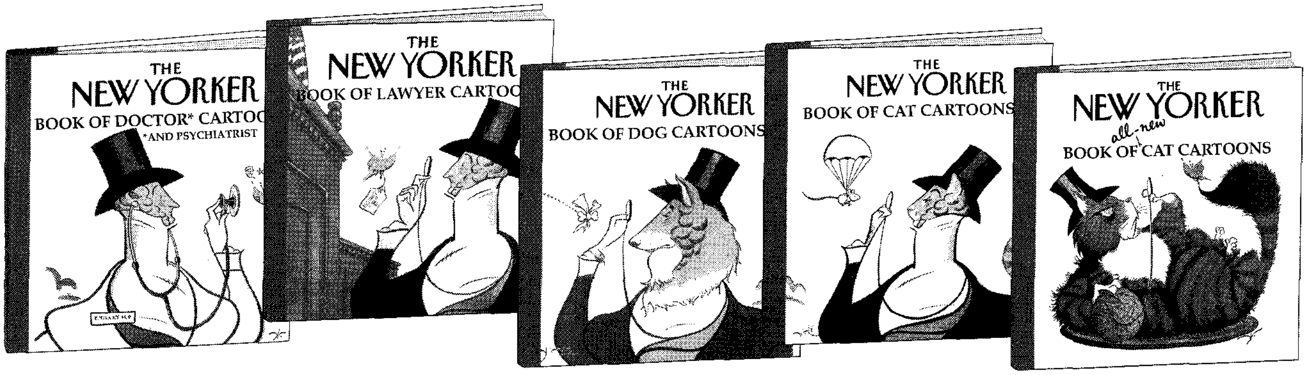
What else is funny?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lar periodical called *The California Prisoner.*

We are all standing on the bar's second level, looking down upon the heads of the hundred or so below us, while drinking beer that has been brewed *on the premises.* The presence of all these people is both surreal and immeasurably comforting. They constitute the only ties Toph and I still have to home, because already, less than a year after we left Chicago, we have lost touch with each and every one of our parents' friends, even our mother's closest friends. Which was odd, Beth and I felt—we expected our progress to be more closely followed, to be checked up on. But it's just as well.

We all watch the crowd below. They are wearing clothes bought secondhand in the Mission or for twice the price in the Haight. They have unbuttoned the first two buttons of their tight synthetic-fibre shirts, worn over T-shirts with logos for nonexistent companies. They have shaved heads or carefully messy Westerberg hair. There are young men up from Stanford in oxford shirts and with short, gelled hair. There are small women in big shoes, wearing snug, snug ribbed tops. They are looking into the faces they see every day and are saying things they've said a hundred times. Like us, they have in their hands beer that has been brewed on the premises. Right there in those big silver vats.

"Should we order some food?" we/they say.

"I don't know. Should we?" we/they say.

From up here, their mouths are moving, but their words are only groans, one continuous, monotonal groan, a sort of mooing, punctuated by the occasional squeal—"Ohmygod!"

There's too many of them, of us. Too many, too similar. What are they all doing here? All this standing, all this standing, sitting, talking. There isn't even a pool table, darts, anything. Just this loitering, lolling, this drinking of beer in thick glasses—

I've risked everything for this?

Something needs to happen. Something huge. The taking over of something, a building, a city, a country. We should all be armed and taking over small countries. Or rioting. Or no: An orgy. There should be an orgy. How

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dare we be standing around, talking about nothing, not running in one huge mass, running at something, something huge, knocking it over? Why do we all bother coming out, gathering here in numbers like this, without starting fires, tearing things down? How dare we not lock the doors and replace the white bulbs with red and commence with the orgy, the joyous mingling of a thousand arms, legs, breasts?

We are wasting this.

Pete sidles up.

"Hey there," he says, in the faint British accent he cultivated in high school. "How is young Toph?"

"Fine," I say.

"Where is he, anyway?"

I love Pete, and he means me no harm, but why this question? Why ask me, when I am out trying to drink and incite orgies, where my brother is? "How" would be fine. "How is your brother?" makes sense and can be answered easily: "Toph is fine." But why "where"? These people should know better. *Are my friends complete morons*?

"At home," I say.

"Oh. With who?"

Razors, chain saws, freezers—

Jesus.

"I have to go."

TOPH and I read every night, usually just for fifteen minutes or so, the longest I can manage before falling asleep myself, but long enough to provide Toph with a degree of comfort and stability, of peace and well-being before he drifts off to his happy child's slumberland . . .

So at the moment we're reading John Hersey's "Hiroshima." Oh, sure, there's all the horror, the indescribable suffering, the people's skin coming off like cottage cheese, but, see, I have decided that as much as there will be fun and hilarity in this house, I am determined to also fill this place with sober and lasting learning. I skip over the really horrific parts, and he listens with the utmost attentiveness, because he is perfect—he is just as enthusiastic about our experiment as I am, wants to be the ideal new-model child. And after I read, carefully explaining the significance of this and that, the historical context (all made up or approximated), it's always nice just to lie for a minute

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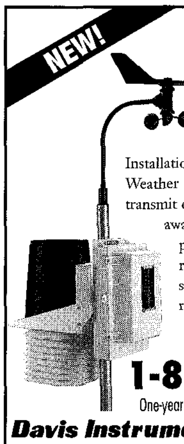

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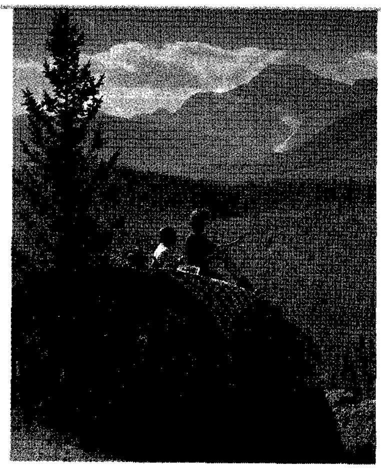

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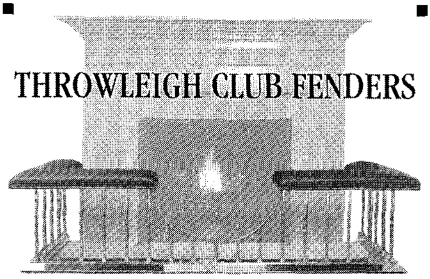

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on his narrow twin bed, with him under the comforter and me on top of it, so nice and warm here . . .

"Get out."

"Ehmp?"

"Out."

"No-o."

"Wake up."

"No, no, no."

"Go to your own bed."

"Oh, please, no. We can both fit."

"Out. Out. Please."

"Fine."

I roll over him, making myself as heavy as possible, then get up. I go into the bathroom and then return to his room while brushing my teeth, humming and doing a little soft-shoe. He rolls his eyes.

I leave the light on, close his door halfway, and walk out to the family room. I straighten the rug, a frayed Oriental we inherited. Toph and I run on it, and when we do the threads grow, ooze out like tendrils. I wonder briefly about protecting it, having it restored, but I know I won't bother. I tuck a wormlike blue thread, seven or eight inches of it, underneath.

I fix the cover on the couch. That couch was perfect and white in our living room in Chicago, but got filthy so quickly here, streaked with black at the corners where we lean our bikes, the pillows now yellow and stained with grape juice, chocolate. We rented an upholstery cleaner, but its effect was laughable. The couch will continue its decline, as will all the things we've been given. Maintenance is impossible. All I do is sweep.

HE SHOULD HAVE REMEMBERED—IT'S HIS STUPID OPEN HOUSE

"GODDAMMIT! We're always late. Why the hell can't you get dressed yourself?"

We are flying down San Pablo, in the left lane, then the right lane, passing Beetles and Volvos, their pleading bumper stickers.

"Roll down your window—it's too hot in here. How come you refuse to open your window when we're boiling? And your buttons are off. Look at your buttons. They're off. Retard."

"*R*etard."

"*R*etard."

"I was dressed fine."

"Dressed fine? Goddammit, you were so *not* dressed fine. Open the window more. A little more. That's good. You were wearing filthy jeans. You cannot dress like that for a school open house. This is special-occasion rules, my man. This is like, give me a break, see? I'm exhausted, I'm a hundred years old, and I just can't be dressing someone in the fourth grade who should be perfectly capable of dressing himself. I mean, Jesus Christ, Toph, can I have a break every once in a while? A little break? A little coöperation? Jesus Christ—"

"You just passed the school."

THE open house is still full—it goes until nine, not eight, as I had thought—and we are both overdressed. Toph immediately untucks his shirt.

In his homeroom, the walls are covered with corrected papers about slavery and the first graders' unsettling self-portraits. "Where's your paper?"

"I don't know. Ms. Richardson didn't like it, I guess."

"Hmmph."

Ms. Richardson must be a moron. I wish to see this "Ms. Richardson." I want this Ms. Richardson brought out and driven before me!

This is our first open house. Heads turn. I am surprised, having expected that everyone would have been briefed about our arrival. Kids look at Toph and say hi. And then they look at me and squint.

They are scared. They are jealous.

We are pathetic. We are stars.

We are either sad and sickly or we are glamorous and new. We walk around, and the choices race through my head. Sad and sickly or glamorous and new?

This is it: we are unusual and tragic and alive.

We are disadvantaged but young and virile. We walk into the throng of parents and children, and we are taller, we radiate: we are the bright new stars born of a screaming black hole, the nascent suns burst from the darkness, from the grasping void of space that folds and swallows—a darkness that would devour anyone not as strong as we are.

We are the chosen ones, obviously, queens to their drones. And we are the future, a terrifyingly bright future, two terrible boys from Chicago cast away and left for dead, shipwrecked, forgotten, but yet, but yet here, resurfaced, bolder and more fearless, bruised and unshaven, sure, our pant legs frayed, our stomachs full of salt water, but now unstoppable, insurmountable—

After about ten minutes, we're bored. Toph's papers aren't on the wall, and my main reason for coming has gone bust.

I was looking to score.

The goal was to meet an attractive single mother and have Toph befriend her son so that we could arrange play dates, during which the mother and I would go upstairs and screw around while the kids played outside. At the open house, I expected meaningful glances and carefully worded propositions. I imagined that the world of schools and parents was oozing with intrigue and debauchery, that under its concerned and well-meaning façade, its two-parent families, conferences with teachers and thoughtful questions directed to the history teacher about Harriet Tubman, everyone was swinging.

But by and large they're ugly. I scan the crowd milling in the courtyard. The parents are interesting only in their prototypical Berkeleyness. They wear baggy tie-dyed, truly tie-dyed, pants, and do not comb their hair. Most are over forty. All the men have beards and are short. Many of the women are old enough to have mothered me, and look it; I am closer in age to most of the children. Oh, but there is one mother, a small-headed woman with long, long, straight black hair, thick and wild like a horse's tail. She looks exactly like her daughter, same oval face, same sad dark eyes. I've seen her before, when I've driven Toph to school, and have guessed that she's single; the father is never present.

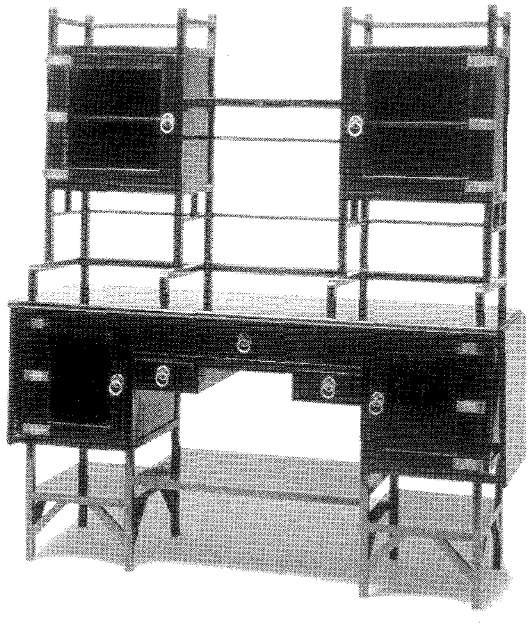
"I'm gonna ask her out," I say.

"Please, don't. Please," Toph says. He really thinks I might.

"Do you like the daughter at all? This could be fun—we could double-date!"

"Please, please don't."

Of course I won't. I have no nerve, only bluster. But he does not know that yet. ♦



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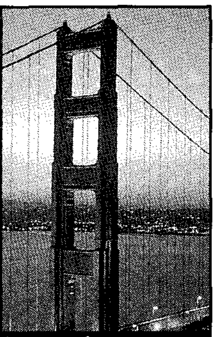

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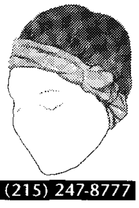

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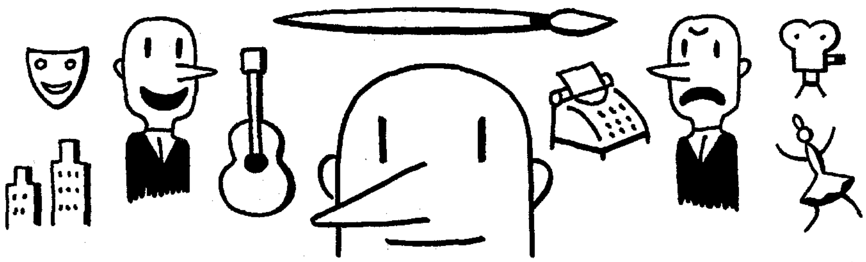


ON TELEVISION

NOT ENTIRELY CLUELESS

The whole social pecking order, from the cool kids to the alienated.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

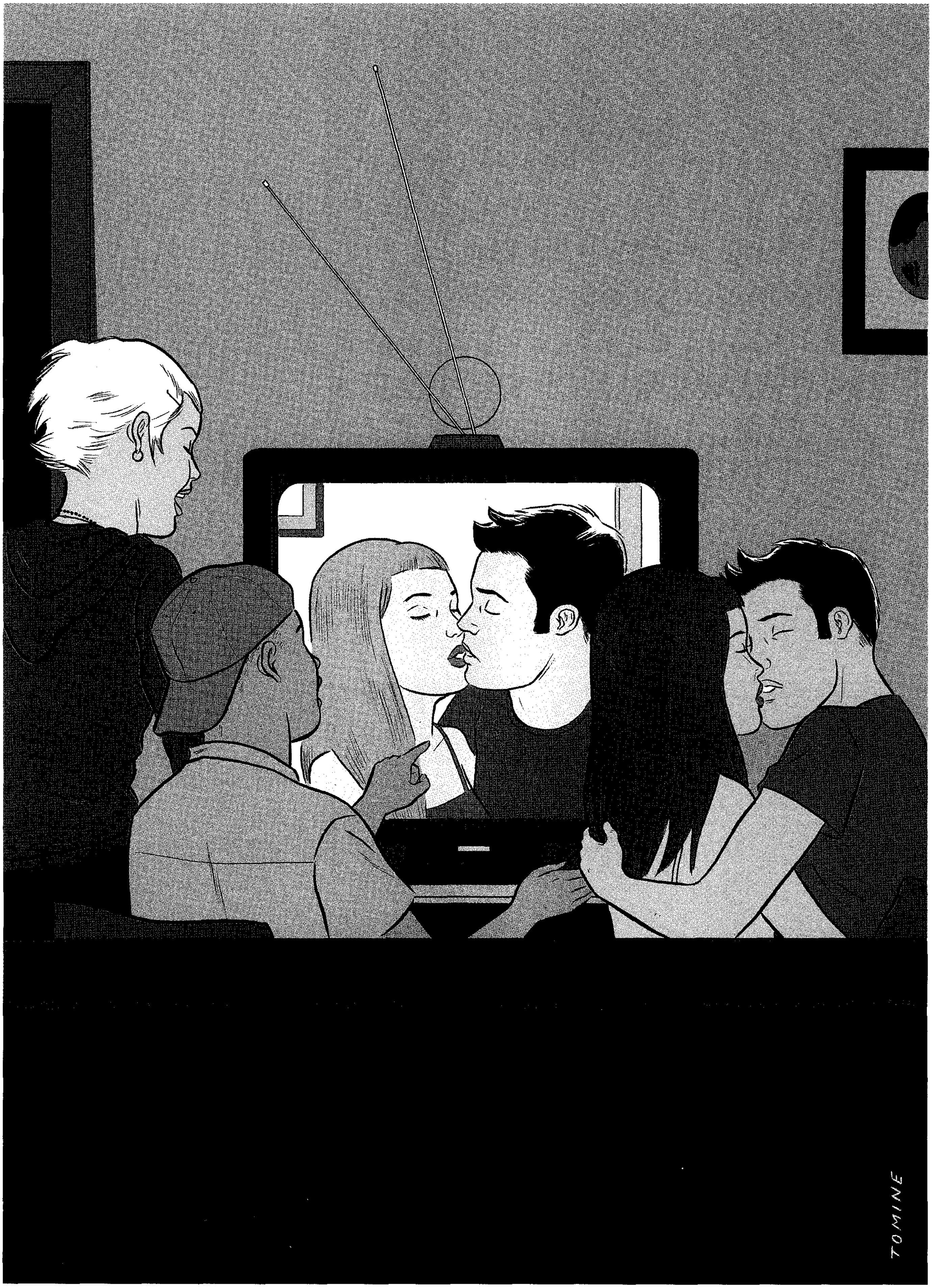
MOST adults, when asked if they would like to relive their high-school days, would check the box next to "You couldn't pay me enough to go through that again." This season on TV, viewers have no choice but to revisit what a character on the new WB show "Popular" calls "the whole heinous high-school experience"; in half a dozen new shows (almost all of them an hour long, to boot), it's teen-agers, teen-agers, and more teen-agers—pimples on parade, as far as the eye can see. (Figuratively speaking, of course: kids on these shows may worry about pimples, but it is apparently against the law for actors portraying kids on TV to actually have any.) In a way, this is less a cultural phenomenon than it is an economic one: as the networks' ability to capture a large, broad audience has diminished, their strategy has been to concentrate their firepower on one small target instead of many. In this new approach, a show doesn't have to be a ratings success to be considered a hit: "Dawson's Creek" was No. 122 in the over-all ratings last season, but it delivered, as they say, a significant teen-age audience. This made the networks happy (in a downsized, lowered-expectations sort of way), because it made advertisers happy, and their collective tears of joy (or relief) are what changed the landscape this year, and caused Dawson's creek to overflow its banks.

Poised as I am halfway between my high-school years and my Medicare years, and not being in possession of any teen-agers of my own, I can't judge how truly these shows depict high school today; they certainly truly depict *other* depictions I've seen on TV and in movies. These days, everyone, regardless of age, broils under the same hot sun of commercial popular culture, and it may be that the show which makes the cleverest references to other TV shows, and to movies, brand names, ads, music, and celebrities, is the most "authentic" show. This kind of hipness has come to have a bad name (the most recent denunciations come from the earnest quill of Jedediah Purdy, the sage of Walton's Mountain), but it's a style that, like any other, has possibilities as well as limitations.

"Popular" and "Freaks and Geeks" (NBC) don't just borrow from pop culture; they are inconceivable without it. Nicole (Tammy Lynn Michaels), the social arbiter of her school in "Popular," is the evil twin of the Alicia Silverstone character in "Clueless"; she and her beautiful blond friend Brooke (Leslie Bibb) are planning a party whose purpose is to set the social agenda for the year—to establish the pecking order of popularity. Trying on a negligée in a store, Nicole asks Brooke, "Is it too Britney Spears?" Brooke and Nicole are in charge of picking the J.V. cheerleading squad this year, and Brooke, who is wrestling with urges to be a better person, feels that they should have let a fat girl, who happened to be the best dancer, on the squad. Nicole takes a hard line against upsetting the social order and admitting "eyesore candy" into the ranks: "We live in the age of Gwyneth, and that is the standard by which all things are judged." An accurate observation, perhaps, but "Popular," while it has some pretty good laugh lines (most of them emanating from Nicole's peppery mouth), is sort of laughable itself—a teen-age-cliché cocktail. Brooke's gorgeous boyfriend, Josh, is the quarterback on the football team; he is torn between playing football and being in the school musical. Brooke has an eating disorder. (She tries to make Carmen, the fat girl, believe that because they both have food issues they are sisters under the skin, but Carmen's not buying.) The tension in the show is mainly between Brooke and Sam (Carly Pope), who is the editor of the school paper (named the *Zapruder Reporter*, since the school is called Kennedy High—get it?) and is wrestling with urges to become one of the popular set. She and Brooke are thrown together in biology lab and, we find out at the end of the second episode, in life, too: Brooke's father has become engaged to Sam's mother! But what's silliest about the whole Brooke/Sam dynamic is that Sam thinks of herself as ugly, when in fact she's a ringer for Liv Tyler. I know that the lesson we're supposed to learn here is that really attractive people can have problems and low self-esteem, just like everybody else. Part of me knows this is true. But the part of me that went to high school and remembers how important looks were thinks, Bite me.

"Freaks and Geeks" is, in a way, a kinder, gentler, and funnier "Popular." Set in a high school in Michigan in 1980, it has a certain period charm. It's not that the era seems charming, it's that the kids in the show actually do seem like real high-school kids, and you feel sort of protective of them. The

ADRIAN TOMINE



The new, self-conscious teen-age shows don't just borrow from pop culture; they are inconceivable without it.

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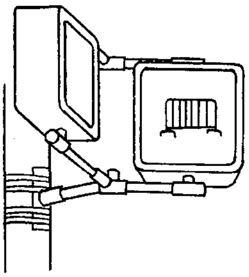
first episode began with the camera panning across a football field and then going up into the bleachers, where it sees a football player and a cheerleader having a heart-to-heart talk. He says to her, "Ashley, it's just that I love you so much it scares me." The camera can't get away from this "Love Story" bogusness fast enough—it zooms down under the bleachers, where a bunch of scruffy guys are hanging out and smoking. (Well, actually they're not smoking, since this is prime-time TV, but they should be.) Next, we see three gawky guys walking along doing imitations of Bill Murray playing a geek on "Saturday Night Live." These two groups are the show's subjects: the freaks and the geeks. They're tied together by Lindsay (Linda Cardellini)—her little brother is one of the geeks, and she, until now a straight arrow, has begun hanging around with the class-cutting freaks.

In "Popular," the kids are obsessed with their social standing around the clock, but what's refreshing about "Freaks" is that you see that the kids are pretty happy when they're with their friends in their own little world—it's only when contact with other groups occurs that their misery begins. One of the geeks, Neil (Samm Levine), may be the most adorable character on TV this fall. He's short, a bit chubby, and dresses like a little man, his button-down shirt neatly tucked in. He doesn't hate himself, and he takes pleasure in his intelligence and his sense of humor (he does a very funny imitation of Captain Kirk), which even allows him to save the day at one point: he helps Lindsay end a party that has got out of control by calling the police and pretending to be a cranky old man who's being kept awake by the noise. "I'm very tired!" he barks into the phone. There are moments in "Freaks and Geeks" that are reminiscent of John Hughes's eighties movies, but it's both rawer and sweeter than those movies were. It has some extremely painful scenes; when Lindsay's attempt to protect a retarded boy from ridicule backfires, it's upsetting in a way that goes far beyond the usual emotional range found in these zitcoms. The show has a real generosity toward its characters, who are given air to breathe and room to grow. It shows that there's not only light at the end of the tunnel of adolescence but some light inside it, too.

"Get Real," on Fox, is a showcase of the devices that have become annoyingly ubiquitous stylistic tics on TV in recent years—mainly, the voice-over and the breaking of the fourth wall. And the series started off with one of those trick scenes you think are real but turn out to be a dream. Mary (Debrah Farentino), a pinched, tightly wound mother of three teen-agers, is having sex with a handsome man, and when that's over her loving children come in with her breakfast on a tray. But it's only a dream. *Damn.* What actually happens is that she wakes up to a fight with her husband and discovers her older son in bed with a girl. I guess you can't really blame Mary for dreaming that things are other than what they are, because her children are three of the most irritating characters ever to appear on TV. The youngest, Kenny, is too cute by half; the middle one, Cameron, is too dumb by half; and the oldest, Meghan, is a snarky know-it-all. And they share their every thought with us. You want to say, "Shut up and act!" Near the beginning of the first episode, Meghan, as she's getting ready for school in her bedroom, says to us, "I know what you're thinking—this is another one of those smart-ass shows where the kids talk to the audience. . . . There is nothing more obnoxious than self-aware teens who know more about life's great mysteries than their parents. Don't worry, we're not going to get all *Sturm*-y, either, like on 'My So-Called Life.' "



Actually, they do get *Sturm*-y, and that's when the show is not half bad: the fights between the parents are petty and ugly—that is, they seem genuine—and in an episode involving a family friend's sudden death everyone's world was duly rocked. Meghan's little swipe at the late, lamented "My So-Called Life," which ran for only nineteen episodes five years ago, and which nevertheless affected the course of a whole genre, is really an homage to it—it's an acknowledgment that this show is its direct descendant. But you almost have to call "Get Real" foolish for inviting, however offhandedly, any comparison to the earlier show: it's a little like Dan Quayle's comparing himself to John F. Kennedy.

"Roswell," on WB, sounds impossibly gimmicky: it's about—there's no other way to say it—teen-age aliens. (One of them says drolly, "I prefer the term 'not of this earth.' ") Set in Roswell, New Mexico, the site of a supposed crash landing of a U.F.O. in 1947, the show, while rooted in richly kitschy soil, surprisingly breaks through it from time to time. The kitsch isn't just of the outer-space variety, either; there's also

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a large element of teen-romance kitsch in the relationship between Max (Jason Behr), one of three aliens who live in the town, and Liz (Shiri Appleby), a local girl who discovers their secret. Max, looking soulful, says to her, "My life is in your hands." Liz, for her part, writes in her diary, "I could feel everything he was feeling. I could feel his loneliness." You almost expect to hear the love theme from Franco Zeffirelli's "Romeo and Juliet" well up. And damned if this show doesn't start with a voice-over, too: panning down from a starry sky, the camera lands on Liz sitting in her back yard writing in her diary. She says, "I'm Liz Parker, and five days ago I died. After that, things got really weird." Indeed.

But the show manages to have both a sense of humor and a sense of suspense, as well as real poignance. The annual U.F.O. festival is taking place in Roswell, and the special guest is Jonathan Frakes, from "Star Trek: The Next Generation," who stands on the stage and makes the live-long-and-prosper hand sign. (Frakes is also an executive producer of "Roswell.") This struck me as a witty nod to a memorable TV moment some years ago when William Shatner addressed a convention of Trekkies in a skit on "Saturday Night Live," and told the assembled geeks to move out of their parents' basements and get a life. The highlight of the festival is an enactment of the U.F.O. crash; everyone whoops and cheers as sparks fly from the impact, but Max and his sister, Isabel, and their friend Michael look on with unutterable sadness. Not only are these three lost in space, without any key to their own past, they're also in danger: they believe that other survivors of the crash were killed and that they will be, too, if their identities become known. The local sheriff, who has reasons of his own for believing in the U.F.O.'s reality, has become suspicious of Max, and, thanks to the very good, menacing-authority-figure performance by William Sadler, we become almost as terrified as Max is that they will be found out. Their predicament puts into high relief the feelings of isolation and loneliness that many teen-agers who were born on this

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BRIEFLY NOTED

NIGHTMARE TOWN, by Dashiell Hammett, edited by Kirby McCauley, Martin H. Greenberg, and Ed Gorman (Knopf; $25). The radically stripped-down prose, emotional detachment, and mordant wit of Hammett's pioneering hardboiled style has been much imitated, but the original still packs a wallop. This collection of stories adds significantly to the amount of Hammett material in print, and it includes three tales featuring the "Maltese Falcon" protagonist, Sam Spade. Hammett evokes an almost Sartrean metaphysics, in which his heroes, lone men operating inside the fog of Prohibition-era San Francisco, are forced to make quick and irrevocably violent determinations about what constitutes good in a morally chaotic universe. At their best, these stories are both terrifying and unexpectedly thrilling.

THE CRIME OF OLGA ARBYELINA, by Andreï Makine, translated from the French by Geoffrey Strachan (Arcade; $24.95). The opening of this lyrical tale is mysterious and disorienting. An old émigré, at the grave of a Russian princess in France, tells how she became an object of scandal: she was found washed up on the edge of a river with a drowned man and was immediately suspected of killing him. From then on, we follow the princess as she leads the most blameless of lives, working as a librarian in a little French town and taking care of her adored hemophiliac son. We are in her company just long enough to fall in love with her before the defining tragedy strikes.

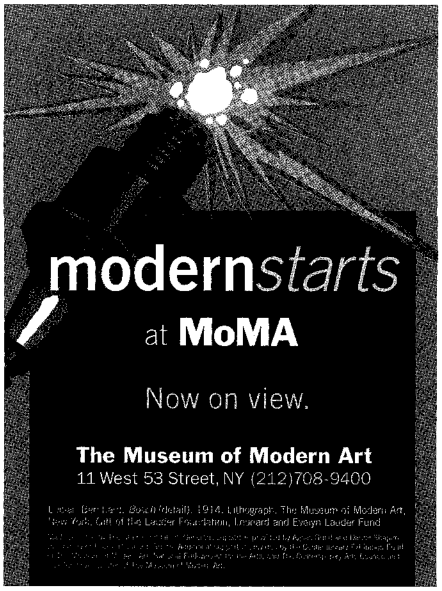
OUR FATHERS, by Andrew O'Hagan (Harcourt Brace; $23). Hugh Bawn, the bricks-and-mortar idealist who built hasty high-rise housing blocks for the Scottish poor, is dying on the eighteenth floor of one; Jamie, the grandson he raised, returns for an extended vigil that includes one final outing to the pub ("We'll have two pints of yer best piss, and a wheelchair"). At times, O'Hagan's prose gets too besotted with country lyricism and incidental irony (e.g., Jamie is a demolitions expert), but his canniness returns in drinking scenes and family rapprochements. Robert Bawn, Hugh's neglectful son and Jamie's brutal father, is an especially poignant creation: a drunk with a Tourette-ish gift for cursing ("wankstain," "bastarding liars,"), he is recognizable as their darker reflection.

THE PLEASING HOUR, by Lily King (Atlantic Monthly; $24). When motherless Rosie arrives in Paris to work as a *jeune fille*, her feelings of anxiety are heightened by the aloofness of Nicole Tivot, the mother of her charges. (The older woman observes of her friends' au pairs, in pointed contrast to her own, "They're beautiful girls, aren't they?") Nicole's husband, Marc, and her three children are frantic to gain her rarely bestowed approval, and Rosie soon falls into step, even as she conceals a growing crush on Marc. It is only when she betrays her employer that she begins to breach the distance between them. Here, as with a palimpsest, each new form of pleasing delineated by the author is made more complex by the imprint of the last.

FLESH AND SPIRIT: PRIVATE LIFE IN EARLY MODERN GERMANY, by Steven Ozment (Viking; $29.95). Ozment, a splendidly readable scholar, has explored the archives of a handful of influential Nürnberg families of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to see what light they shed on contemporary families. Much is unchanged: a young man falls in love, a father rejoices at the birth of a child, a widow frets over her spendthrift son. The frequency with which early death claimed these burghers is a significant difference, but the sprawling stepfamilies created by remarriages were usually harmonious, and Ozment's conclusion suggests a fistful of reasons for this striking cohesiveness.

HOW TO STOP TIME: HEROIN FROM A TO Z, by Ann Marlowe (Basic; $24). This lexicon of meditations is designed to conjure the eternal present of a life structured around the various observances of heroin use. Marlowe applies admirable rigor to contemplating the drug's role in her disparate existences as a Wall Street analyst and a *Village Voice* rock critic during her seven-year stint as a user. Especially provocative are the parallels she draws between drug use and consumer society, and her refusal to accept the commonplace model of addiction as an illness. Ultimately, though, it's the stories she relates about her discovery of disturbing family secrets and her relationships with a series of self-destructive bohemians that are most compelling.

THE SUN IN THE CHURCH: CATHEDRALS AS SOLAR OBSERVATORIES, by J. L. Heilbron (Harvard; $35). In this elegant work, Heilbron recounts how in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Roman Catholic Church fashioned several of its major cathedrals into precision instruments for studying the motions of the sun. The aim was to determine the time between vernal equinoxes, so that the dates of Easter could be forecast accurately—"lest," as a Jesuit remarked, "God's business be performed negligently or carelessness slip into divine things." The means was (and is) exquisitely exemplified in the basilica of San Petronio, in Bologna: a small opening, cut high in the south wall, projects the sun's image at noon onto a line of decorated marble some fifty yards long on the church's floor. The image's yearly swing along the lengthy meridian line marked out the solar calendar to unprecedented accuracy while yielding valuable heavenly data. Heilbron, upending common views of the Church's relationship to science after it condemned Galileo, shows that Rome handsomely supported astronomical studies, accepting the Copernican hypothesis as a fiction convenient for calculation.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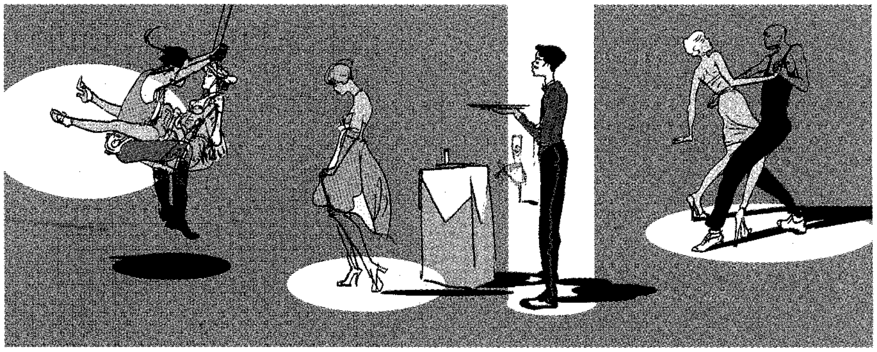
planet experience, as well as the feeling of being unfairly stuck in the wrong family. The couple who adopted Max and Isabel love them, while Michael's foster father tolerates him only for the sake of the monthly check. (The show perhaps hits this nail too hard: Max and Isabel live in a nice house in a nice neighborhood; Michael lives in a trailer park on the edge of town.) Life *is* unfair and arbitrary, and we didn't ask to be here; but, hey, at least we have a planet that we can call home. "Roswell" comforts the inner teen-ager in all of us, and also puts things into perspective: we may have good reason to feel sorry for ourselves, but it's instructive to realize that there are people who have even better reason. So the next time you meet a teen-age alien, be kind. ◆

THE THEATRE

GOTTA DANCE

"Contact" finds narrative in the sweet melee of the dance floor.

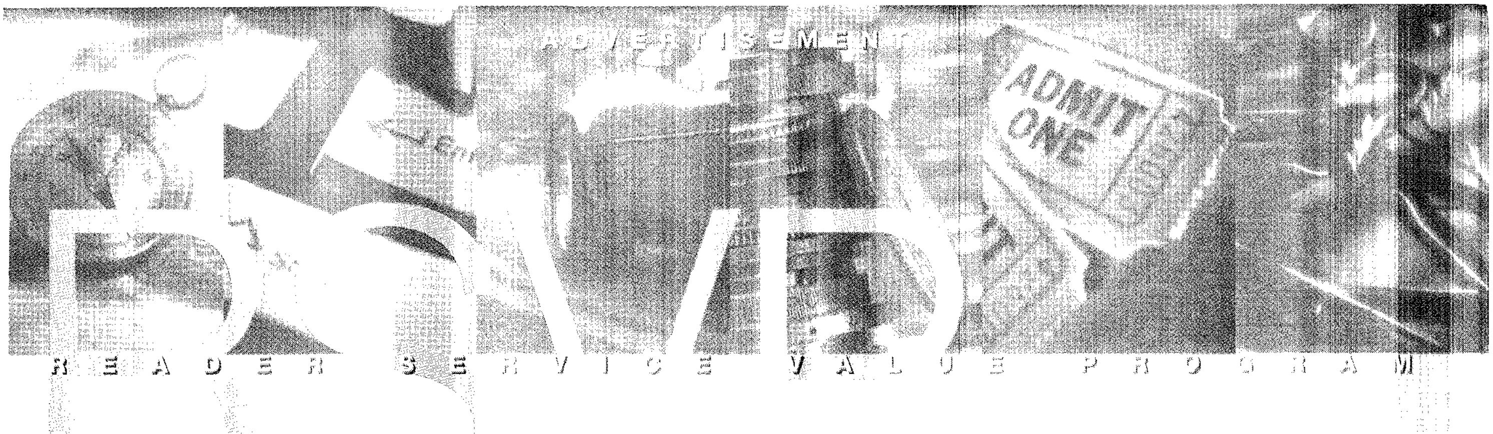
BY JOHN LAHR



ISTVAN BANYAI

"THIS is not a revival!" the marquee of one current Broadway show says. The joke is on the American musical, and on the proliferation of musical revivals, which have spread like kudzu over the theatre district. As the musical moves into the twenty-first century, it seems to have lost confidence in both what to celebrate and how to celebrate it. Just who is running the great American fun machine? It's not the comedians, who lost the franchise in the early forties to musical drama; it's not the book writers, who exist nowadays to play soft-pitch to the musical elements; it's not the directors, since there are only a handful who can even manage the mass maneuver; and, although for the last thirty years composer-lyricists have had the best crack of the whip, it's not them, either. Even Stephen Sondheim, whose musicals are the high-water marks of musical storytelling in this era, has won disciples but not audiences. Sondheim is a great talent and a bad example; his deconstruction of the musical has led to the freighting of the genre with more intellectual baggage than it can successfully bear.

In "Contact," a dance play at Lincoln Center's Mitzi Newhouse Theatre, the choreographer and director Susan Stroman modestly proposes, in a triptych of simple stories, that perhaps dance and dancers can revive the musical's narrative impasse. She may be on to something. Her experiment, which was co-conceived with John Weidman, is a big-hearted, witty crowd-pleaser; it strips away exposition to about five minutes of dialogue, and dances to classic and popular musical standards to make its points about modern life. The effect is startling and fresh and free from the infernal pretentiousness of so much Broadway spectacle. Dance, which is about resonances and not reason, allows an audience to be



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more playful; without lyrics and exposition underlining every moment and telling the audience what to think, viewers are free to fill in the emotional outlines of each gesture. The heart wants to soar; here, amazingly, it occasionally does.

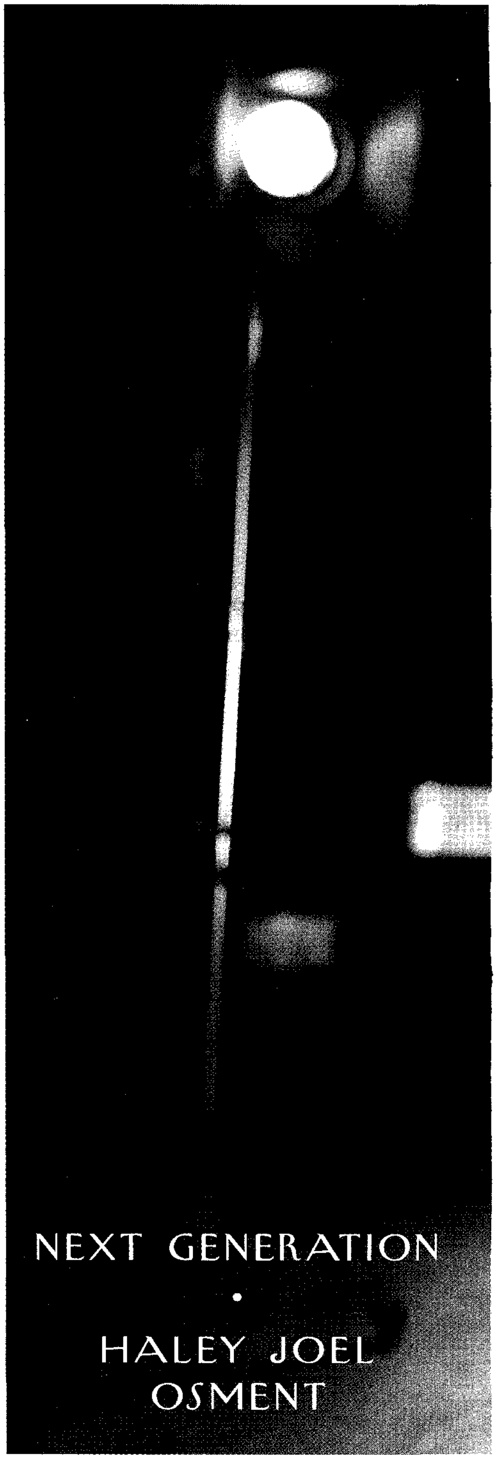
Stroman, who did the choreography for "Crazy for You" and, most sensationally, for Trevor Nunn's British revival of "Oklahoma!," is the current kingpin of Broadway choreographers. Her dramaturgical gift is more elegant than her dances are. "Contact," as the title implies, is about various forms of human connection; in other words, it's about the atmosphere of longing. The opening capriccio, "Swinging," takes its inspiration from Fragonard's famous 1767 painting "The Swing," but Stroman skillfully teases the picture's idealized gentility. The girl on the swing (Stephanie Michels) tantalizes her lover, only to assume every position but the Viennese Oyster as she couples on the swing with the servant (Seán Martin Hingston). In a surprising reversal at the scene's last beat, the seduction proves to be a psychodrama in which the servant is revealed as the master and vice versa; ennui as much as appetite has been the spur to the game.

The lyric and comic potential of Stroman's experiment comes together most powerfully in the eponymous "Contact," which forms the second part of the evening, and which tells the story of Michael Wiley (the excellent Boyd Gaines), a successful but desperate ad man in his forties, who, after winning an advertising award, returns home determined to kill himself. While he drunkenly clatters around the bare floor of Thomas Lynch's cleverly stylized modern interior, the answering machine on his desk beeps messages: one from friends asking him to come swing-dancing at a hot new club; one from his shrink, who suspects his suicidal depression; and one from the sleep-starved lady in the apartment beneath him, who is hounding him to get a carpet. Meanwhile, Wiley has fashioned the curtain cord into a noose around his neck and is about to hang himself from the light fixture.

The dance is a dream of connection in a life about to end for lack of it. Here, in a series of beautiful transitions, Wiley moves back and forth between the spare white modernity of his room and the cluttered, shadowy funk of the fantasized swing-dancing club. "Who comes here?" he asks the bartender, who serves him a beer. "They don't talk about themselves," the bartender says. "They just dance." And what they dance is Wiley's unconscious wish for grace, intimacy, sexual acceptance, and joy. Stroman's dances, which indulge their sexy savoir faire perhaps too much, play like the best MTV video you've ever seen—a kind of kinetic heaven where people seem magically to float across the stage dancing on pool tables, pinball machines, bars. Stroman nails the thrill by enlisting great rock-and-roll songs—"Do You Wanna Dance," "Runaround Sue," "Simply Irresistible"—rather than the usual run of second-rate Broadway music.

The focus of Wiley's desire is an iconic golden girl (the superb Deborah Yates), a feline powerhouse dressed in yellow with glitter on her chest and light all around her. She turns Wiley on—along with every other male in the audience. She is the unattainable object of desire, and Stroman builds on this hilariously as Wiley, at first, is unable to get his legs to move when she sits down next to him. He is filled with self-loathing, hope, frustration, and fear as he tries and fails to reach her in the sweet melee of the dance floor. When they finally meet and connect, it's to the glorious sound of the Benny Goodman clarinet licks that come in the middle of Gene Krupa's steaming drum solo on "Sing, Sing, Sing." It's big, showy Broadway stuff—an erotic dream so vulgar and vivid that its charge sends Wiley sprawling to the floor and back to the reality of his botched suicide.

The clatter yields another irate telephone call from Wiley's downstairs neighbor. She is, we soon see, the golden girl of his dream, but he has met her only briefly in the elevator. He promises to carpet his floor, on one condition. "I want you to dance with me," he tells her. "I've been on this earth forty-three years, and I just realized I don't know anybody." In the end,

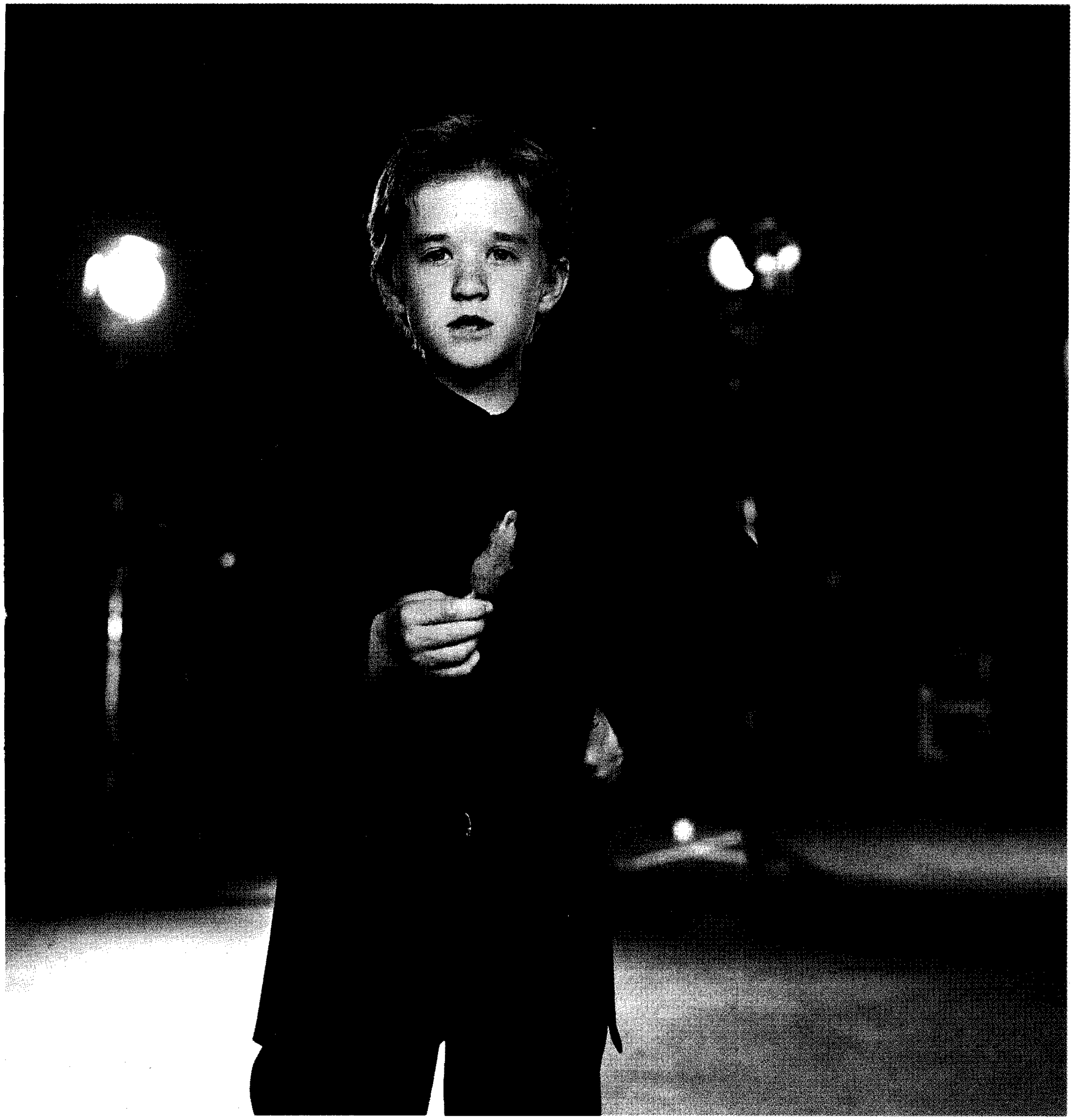


NEXT GENERATION

•

HALEY JOEL OSMENT

When you see a young screen actor for the first time, it's hard to distinguish the actor from his role, and you can't always tell how good he is. But looking at the eleven-year-old Haley Joel Osment in "The Sixth Sense" you can't fail to think, This kid's got it. The role of Cole Sear, a boy literally haunted, required that Osment look frightened all the time, and, through control of his eyes (which turned red-rimmed), his



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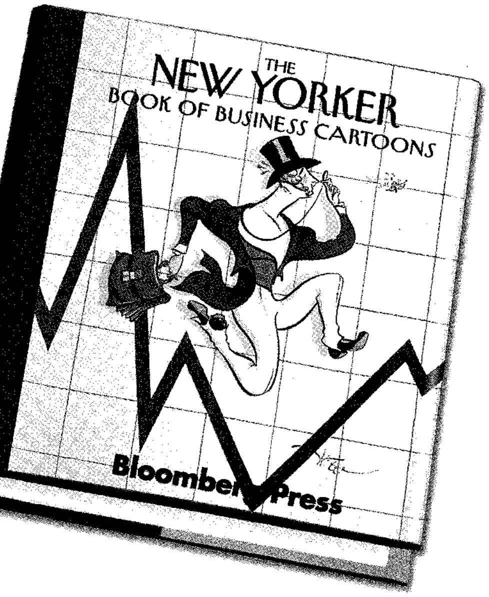
chin, and the placement of his face in relation to the camera, Osment incised each moment of terror like a draftsman of long experience. "I am more interested in the psychological aspects of fear than in gushing blood and gore," says Osment, who speaks rapidly and with a little chirp. "Before each scene, I read the scene four times. I thought about experiences from my life or from other movies and put together fragments of everything I had ever known. There was a scary scene from 'Alien'—I thought of that. And some really childish things, like leaping into bed because I was sure there was something hiding under it. In the kitchen scene where Cole sees the ghost, I had to overwhelm myself with shock. So, out of instinct, I threw myself at the walls of the set. They're pretty flimsy, you know—just held up by two-by-fours."

At the moment, Osment may be Hollywood's hottest young property. The sixth grader, who has been acting since he was five (largely in television), will start work this fall on a new movie, "Sebastian's Love," in which, as the son of a single mom, Lena Olin, he has to deal with Olin's new suitor, William Hurt. "I personally would like to do theatre, and I'd love to make an action film," he says. "You have to pick what characters you play well." —DAVID DENBY

Photograph by Martin Schoeller

Very funny business, indeed!



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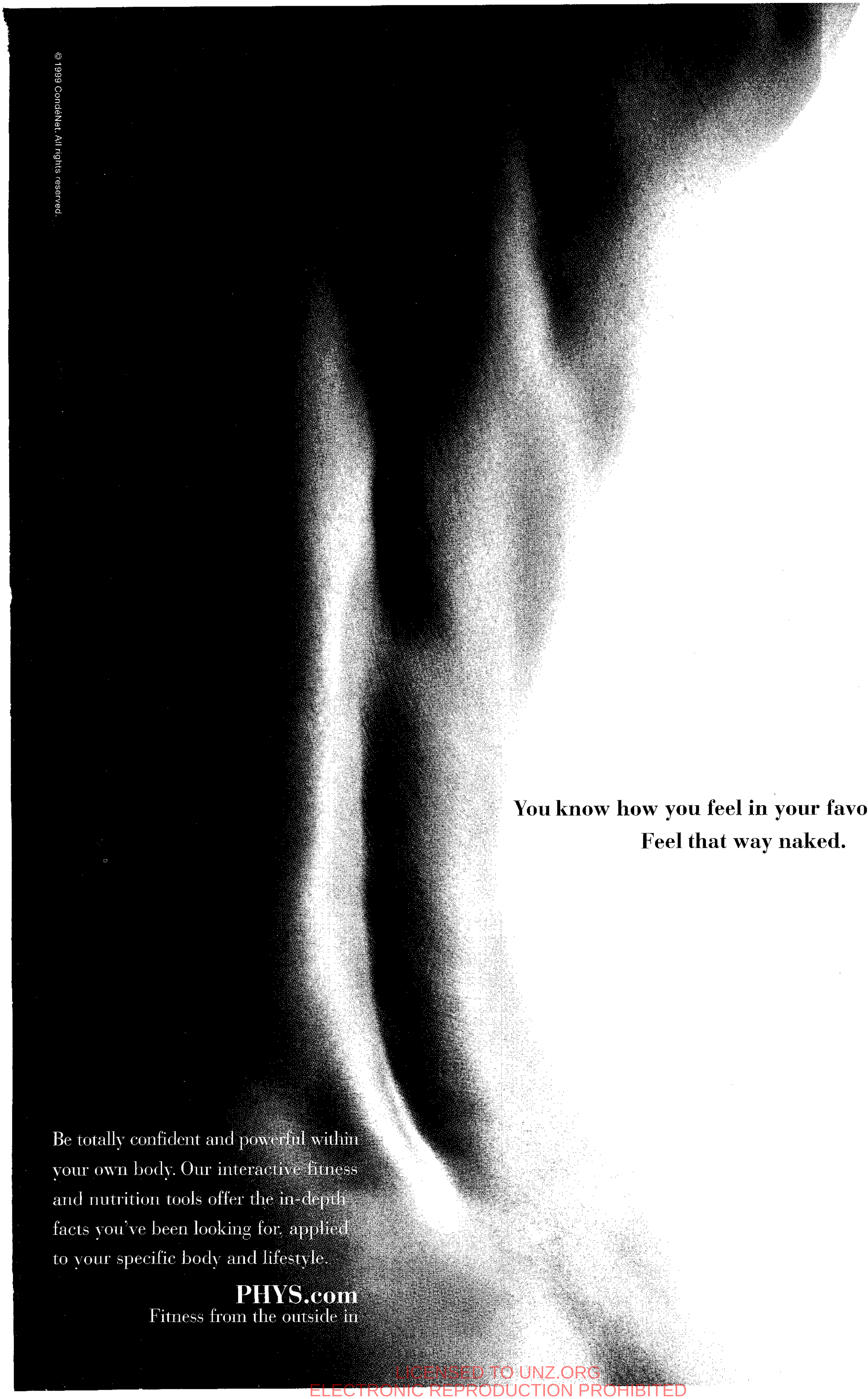
they dance; at the finale, after the actors have taken their bows, Wiley and his golden girl end up alone onstage with the advertising award. He looks at the award, then walks off with the girl. It's a neat piece of Broadway idealism. Not to worry, though. Come the Tony Awards, Stroman and some of the players should be back to pick up the prize.

"EPIC PROPORTIONS" (at the Helen Hayes) is a spoof of a Biblical movie being shot in the Arizona desert in the early thirties. The show dramatizes many plagues—plagues of boils and locusts and frogs—but no plague is greater than what the show itself personifies: the plague of corporate culture which has been visited upon Broadway in the last few years, and which has turned the street from a raffish showplace into a kind of brain-dead theme park.

The play, written by Larry Coen and David Crane (a co-creator of "Friends"), has nothing to say and says it rather badly. What's strange in a piece that has no ear for the moment—in fact, one that escapes entirely from any contemporary comment on anything—is that it contains a pitch-perfect performance by Kristin Chenoweth. Despite the banality of the camp proceedings, she carries on a private and very funny conversation with the audience. Chenoweth, who won a Tony last season for her performance as Sally Brown in an execrable production of "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown," is a comedienne of terrific originality and charm. Here her quirky voice is sharp and high, as if she'd just inhaled helium. "So welcome to Molten Rock, Arizona," she says, playing an assistant director lecturing the extras, who turn out to be mostly us. "We will be filming the D. W. DeWitt production of 'Exeunt Omnes,' which is evidently Latin for 'everybody out.' Who knew?" Chenoweth uses her pert marcelled blond head the way earlier clowns used slap shoes—to punctuate jokes and to raise a laugh from the most unpromising material. She is a bona-fide stage star; in an earlier era, she would have been surrounded by other adroit players, and together they would have been capable of turn-



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ing this burlesque into a good night out. But neither Jerry Zaks's sluggish direction nor the playing of the supporting cast has Chenoweth's sense of freedom. In hair and heels, she stands about five feet two. She has curves, a baby face, and a wide mouth that's good for mugging. She's not eccentric, like Bea Lillie, or hostile, like Nancy Walker, but she's a player of their calibre at a time when there are few vehicles to show off her zany innocence. Chenoweth invests every moment with belief; but even her backbone and brightness can't save this show, which has not a single redeeming defect. ♦

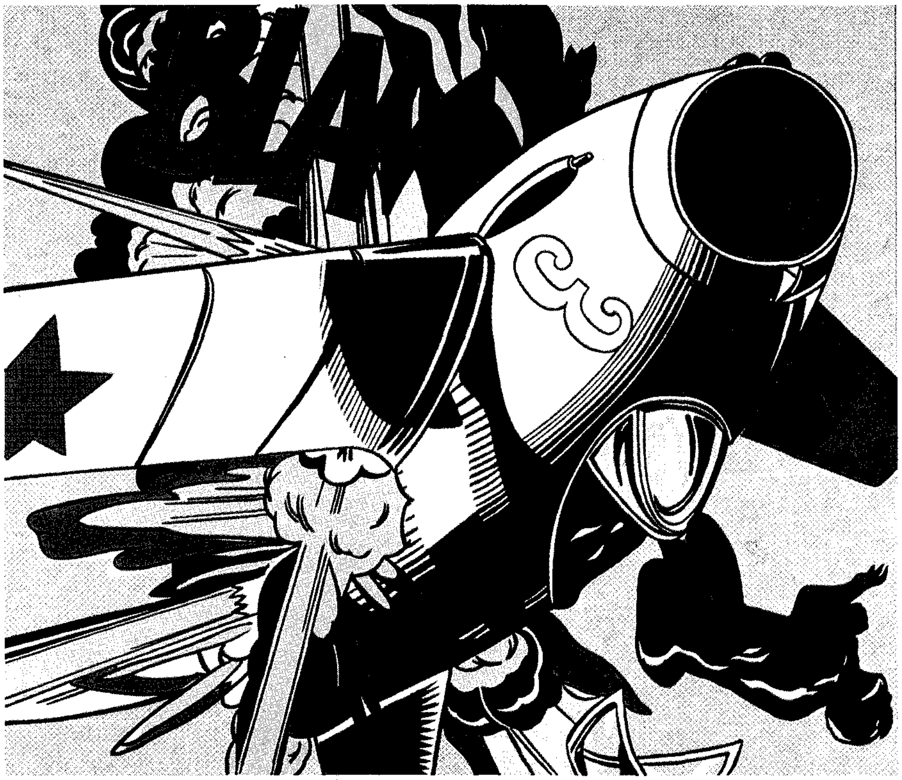
THE ART WORLD

ALL THAT JAZZ

The Whitney celebrates the triumph of postwar American art.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

This is more like it. Part II of "The American Century: Art and Culture, 1900-2000," at the Whitney Museum, bathes native creativity of the last fifty years in an intelligent glow. To say that it improves on last spring's Part I, which buried the century's first half in defensive oversell, puts the matter mildly. The present installation, by the curator Lisa Phillips and the architect Christian Hubert, is plenty jazzy—blockbuster shows must entertain mightily or disgrace the name of blockbuster—but Phillips everywhere displays lovely instincts for letting art speak on its own terms. Part I's curator, Barbara Haskell, thematized the bejesus out of everything. Art works served as illustrations in a sort of gigantic educational brochure. Supposedly auxiliary pop-cultural artifacts—movie clips, comic strips, Fred and Ginger dancing—carried that show's aesthetic and intellectual weight, such as it was.



Roy Lichtenstein's "Blam" (1962) at the Whitney: Enter the masses.

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Phillips has better art to work with, of course, as well as a historical saga that tells and sells itself. American art smoldered damply until just after the Second World War. Then it combusted. So goes a story that is so familiar, and so imbued with nationalistic euphoria, that against-the-grain intellectuals never stop trying to debunk it. But there is simply no getting around American art's postwar rocket ride—coming, as it did, after a period when our best modern achievements, according to the erstwhile New Yorker Marcel Duchamp, were our bridges and our plumbing. Try to resist the Whitney's mini-Grand Canyons of classical Abstract Expressionism, Pop, and Minimalism. You will lose to the testimony of your own eyes and gut. The beauty, raciness, and muscle of those revolutionary movements remain imperturbably august and daisy-fresh.

Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and David Smith greet us at the fifth-floor elevator door, with concatenating bangs. Robert Rauschenberg's small "Erased de Kooning Drawing" (1953)—a famous Oedipal hissy fit, performed on a drawing that he had cajoled for the purpose from an indulgent de Kooning—fulminates in a corner, hinting of whipsaws in store. It speaks volumes about the era's imperatives of steely ambition and hellbent audacity. The next room plunges us into the fifties, when manly painting ruled. Mildly revisionist, Phillips canonizes works by women—quite persuasively in the case of Joan Mitchell, Grace Hartigan, and Louise Bourgeois, less so in that of Lee Krasner—and includes Abstract Expressionist-inspired photographs by Aaron Siskind and Minor White. This show's interweavings of painting and photography are a recurrent tour de force.

Next comes a how-de-do to Color Field painting—four paintings, including Helen Frankenthaler's talismanic "Mountains and Sea" (1952); the brevity of this selection may spark controversy, given

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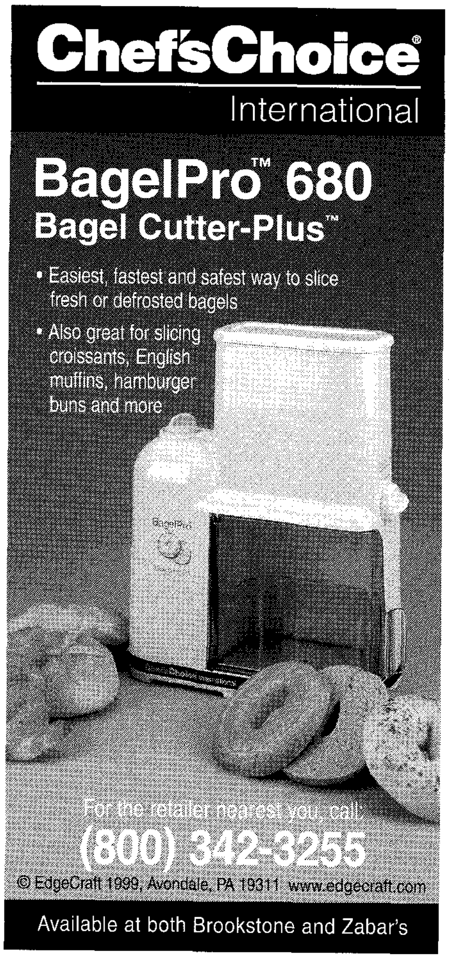
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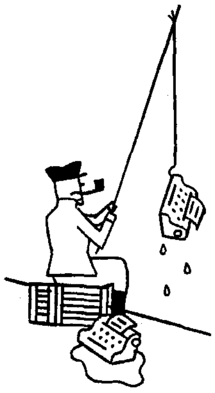
the present return to academic esteem of the late critic and Color Field mentor Clement Greenberg. The scant emphasis on this brilliantly propagandized, visually sterile genre seems perfect to me. I am less happy with Phillips's gawky usage of "Figurative Expressionism" for the terrific paintings by Edward Hopper, David Park, Richard Diebenkorn, Larry Rivers, and Fairfield Porter. (Porter's radiantly sensitive double portrait from 1960 depicts the prefamous Andy Warhol, by the way.) The rubric's forced play on "Abstract Expressionism," implying a merely outrigger phenomenon, falsifies work that augmented modern art in idiosyncratic veins. Giving belated credit to such admirable conservatives demands a far less summary treatment, which I expect art historians in the near future will provide.



Phillips and Hubert have devised a winning, walk-in circus of an installation for Pop Art—brazening the good (topnotch Warhol, Lichtenstein, et al.), the bad (instantly decadent Tom Wesselmann), and the delightfully peculiar (glancingly Pop gems by Edward Ruscha, Alex Katz, Vija Celmins, and other independents). Also on hand is an area where one may rest in a beanbag chair while listening to Jimi Hendrix and zoning out on lava lamps. This is the one place in the show where popular culture—which is otherwise tucked away into well-considered "Cultural Sites"—obtrudes in a big way. It makes a serious point. Pop made manifest an implicit achievement of the Abstract Expressionists—not their victory over European tradition (this was a by-product) but their invention of art styles that rivalled, in social and physical scale, mass American culture itself: paintings as good as the movies, to adapt a phrase from Frank O'Hara. Mass culture took note of the Pop revelation and danced madly to tunes of art.

That there is something odd about Phillips's great hall of Minimalism gradually dawns on the viewer. The only color in the room is the wan blue of a glossy slab by the California sculptor John McCracken. Sculptures by Donald Judd, Robert Morris, Carl Andre, Tony Smith, and Dan Flavin, and paintings by Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly run the gamut from black to white. Coming after Pop's Day-Glo monsoon, the chaste frigidity of this nearly contemporaneous art shocks agreeably and instructively. The twin movements reacted in neatly opposite ways to Abstract Expressionism's triumph. Dionysian Pop made fun of high art. Apollonian Minimalism stripped it bare. Pop melted away into the flow of global visual style. Minimalism kept its shape, and has since become the dominant aesthetic of international art.

Now I am remembering Max's Kansas City in the early seventies, where one passed by sullen Minimalists who sat drinking at the bar to join the amphetamined Warhol crowd in the back room. It was like wading through heavy metal toward strawberry shortcake. The split scene felt like ground zero of the world. It was.

IN this show, as in history, the majesty of American art in the nineteen-fifties and sixties overshadows what follows. Decline began with late-sixties Postminimalism, although that awkwardly named avant-garde still mustered powerful inventions by Bruce Nauman, Richard Serra, and Eva Hesse. It grew steeper with the narcissistic games of Conceptualism, then skidded through developments that scarcely merit proper nouns. "Pattern and Decoration" and "New Image" denote the last New York movements, which sputtered briefly just before a renewed alertness to European—mostly German—art punctured American pride. In the eighties, such painters as David Salle, Julian Schnabel, and Eric Fischl became the first local big-timers in fifty years to evince transatlantic influences. Meanwhile, New York is still—and may it always be—a painting town. The likes of Brice Marden, Chuck Close, Elizabeth Murray, Leon Golub, Terry Winters, and Sue

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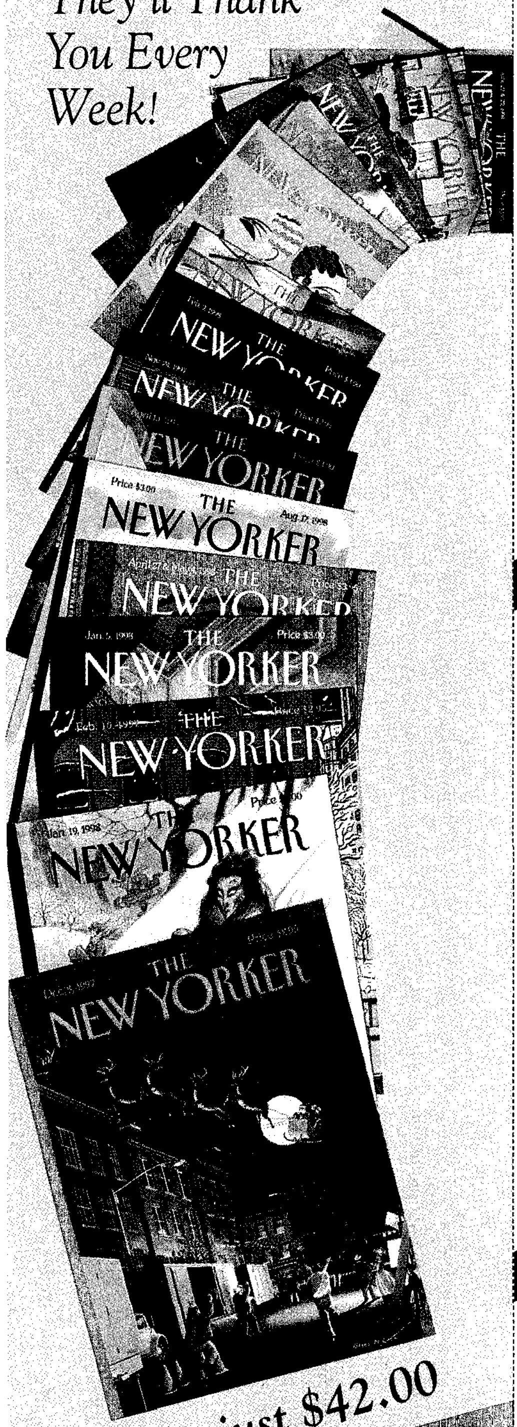

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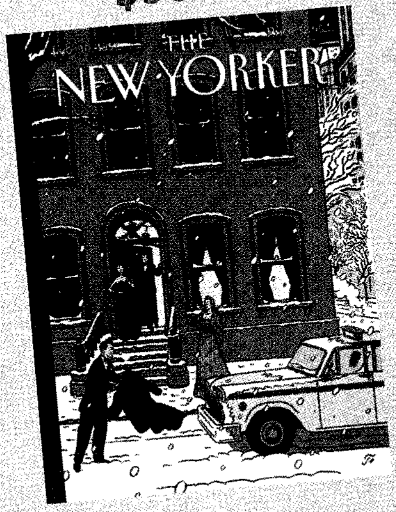

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Williams keep eking pictorial gold from seemingly played-out lodes of the grand manner.

"The Mediated World" is Phillips's term of despair—no cogent "ism," only a cursorily labelled file—for twenty years' worth of attempts by elaborately art-schooled artists to be clever in theory and trenchant in politics. Save for the resourceful brilliance of a Cindy Sherman, the inspired vulgarity of a Jeff Koons, and the seraphic grace of a Felix Gonzales-Torres (whose simple strings of light bulbs are the most mysteriously moving art works of their time), the bulk of most of this stuff now looks incredibly weak. As for art that has emerged in the nineties, Phillips merely throws together a panicky miscellany of little stars. She omits several of my current faves, including Karen Kilimnik and John Currin; and constraints of space cripple her treatment of a time that is inclined to installational expansiveness. Never mind. A goodly chunk of the coming century may elapse before we acquire useful perspectives on a remarkably addled decade.

The show finds ingenious ways to incorporate finely selected videos, films, and a slide show (Nan Goldin's scuzzy, poignant "The Ballad of Sexual Dependency"). It takes hours to consume everything, but you will be glad for the effort. Whatever you do, spare thirty-four and a half minutes for Robert Smithson's film from 1970 about "Spiral Jetty," his Earthwork in the Great Salt Lake. Part II of "The American Century" has a beating heart for me, and this is it. Smithson, a genius whose previous accomplishments had been spotty, reached maturity with the Jetty—three years before his death in a plane crash at the age of thirty-five. So, for a brief and enraptured spell, did something that I want to call the American spirit in art. See if you agree. ♦

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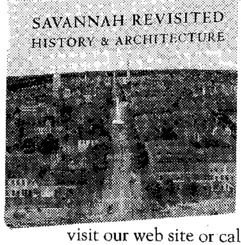

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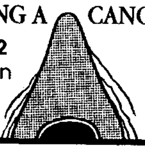

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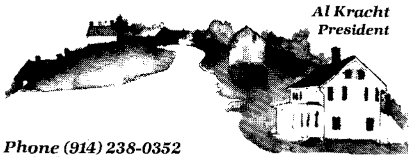

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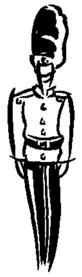

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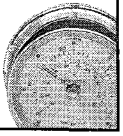

NEXT GENERATION • THE HILTON SISTERS

NEW YORK has always had "It" girls, from Brenda Frazier and Cornelia Guest to Baby Jane Holzer and Edie Sedgwick. Now it has mini-"It" girls. At sixteen and eighteen, Nicky and Paris Hilton are the littlest socialites in town. Thin, blond, and wellborn—their great-grandfather was Conrad Hilton—they moved from L.A., with their parents three years ago, and are now out and about with the city's most entitled teens. Like Eloise, whose story the two say they read "like, a hundred years ago," they live in a hotel (the Waldorf, in their case, where Paris, left, and her sister were photographed), and they often find themselves scrutinizing a grownup picture-book world. Sometimes it can be absolutely underwhelming.

"We don't like this party," Paris was saying at a store opening for the English designer Nicole Farhi one evening recently. "It's boring, and we're seeing our mother's friends." Nicky nodded glumly, adding, "Never a good sign." Charging up a flight of stairs in their platform heels, they scooted past Arnold Scaasi, the designer, who is an acquaintance of the family's. "Girls, come give me a kiss and talk to me," he said.

"We can't, Scaasi," Nicky said. "We have to go to the next party, downtown." They left him gaping.

Without even a smile, they can breeze past the velvet ropes at Moomba or get a seat at Le Bilboquet. And, along with a taste for charity benefits and the couture shows in Paris ("So much more creative than the shows in New York," they agree), they've developed an appetite for something else their elders enjoy: seeing their names in print. Carrying twin candy-colored cell phones instead of tennis racquets, they're the Venus and Serena Williams of competitive socializing—made for the paparazzi and each other, too.

"We get along because we're so much alike," Paris says.

"We used to fight over petty things, like toys," Nicky adds. "But now we're more mature." —BOB MORRIS

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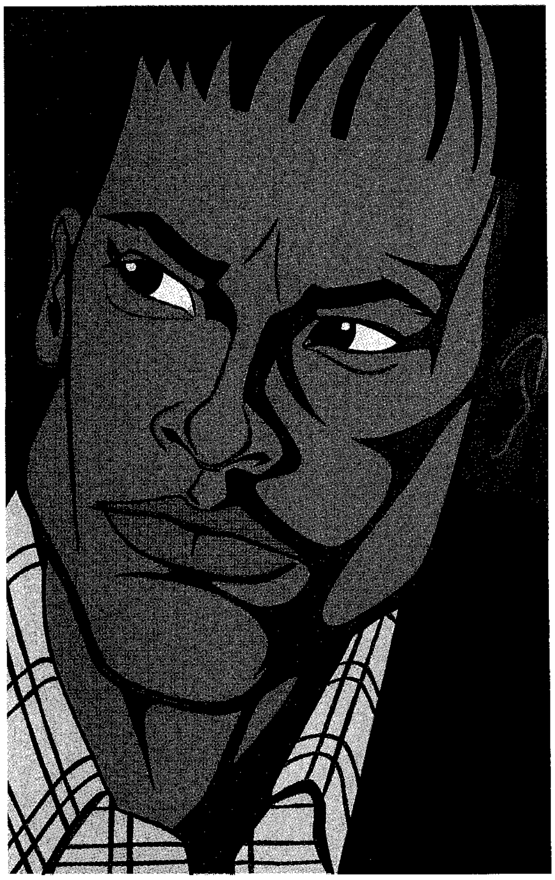
THE CURRENT CINEMA

BOYS WILL BE BOYS

The lyrical adventures of Brandon Teena, and the disaffected "Fight Club."

BY DAVID DENBY

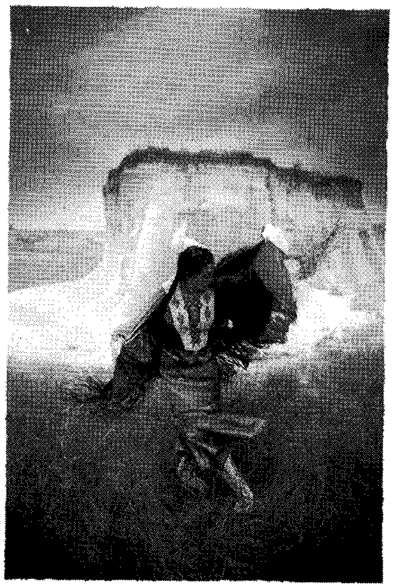
IN "Boys Don't Cry," a young woman named Teena Brandon (Hilary Swank) clips her hair into a butch cut, flattens her breasts, puts on boys' clothes and a boy's swagger, and passes in the world as Brandon Teena, handsome young dude. What she feels is pure exhilaration; what we feel is dismay and fear. Leaving her home turf, in Lincoln, Nebraska, where she has run aground, sexually and in every other way, she enters a bar in Falls City and attracts the notice of a young woman who blinks a few times but takes "Brandon" for a smooth-cheeked young man. Soon Brandon is happily fighting over this girl with some heavy-bellied boozer. To be a guy, just a regular guy, in a barroom fight! "I'm gonna have a shiner in the morning," she says proudly. "Boys Don't Cry" could have gone wrong in about a thousand ways. A young woman who's thinking about a sex-change operation and who dresses as a man and gets away with it (at least for a while)—this story, almost clinical in its oddity, almost embarrassing in its social and erotic details, might have been killed by a dozen varieties of sensationalism or sickly pity. But "Boys Don't Cry," which is based on actual events, is a terrific movie—an unexpected triumph over the longest odds. The director, Kimberly Peirce, who wrote the screenplay with Andy Bienen, embraces a full-bodied lyrical realism in which nothing is exaggerated but nothing is avoided, either—not dreams or desire or inspiration or stupidity. It's a delicately conceived, fearless movie.



An open-eyed eagerness: Hilary Swank as Brandon, passing for a guy in "Boys Don't Cry."

BONNIE BRYANT

Peirce, who has made only short films in the past, spent five years researching, writing, casting, and shooting "Boys Don't Cry." She wound up shuffling things around a bit, simplifying the tangle of relationships, and sacrificing strict documentary truth for dramatic power. Having seen the results, no one, I think, could rationally wish her to have done otherwise. By instinct, Peirce heads for the emotional center of the story. A woman cross-dressing in small-town Nebraska is obviously courting trouble, but Brandon needs to do it—it isn't a whim—and what connects her to the rest of us is her recklessness and her desire. For who hasn't longed to leave his past behind with a single step, to conquer a new scene and become a lover? Brandon's madness springs from a universal im-



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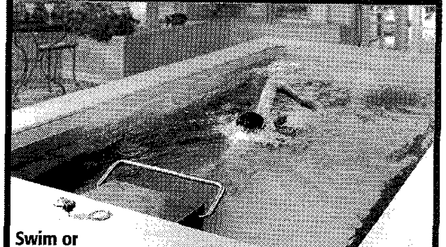
pulse. The young TV and movie actress Hilary Swank, who wore her husband's clothes to the audition for the part, has an open-eyed animal eagerness—a readiness to please and to appreciate, which is part of what appeals to the young women Brandon meets. (They don't get much attention from the sodden men in town.) Reed-slender, with a flattened upper lip, high cheekbones, and a big smile, Swank practices her coltish, young-stud moves in the mirror, hitching herself this way and that, and then grins at the image, amazed and scared at the same time. She passes, but just barely. There's always an element of doubt in the women she meets, a slight hesitation before acceptance, which makes the scenes both funny and subversive: the women seem to want the feminine as well as the masculine in a lover.

At first, "Boys Don't Cry" has the feel of a fifties youth movie. One may be reminded of the atmosphere of inchoate longing and crushed tenderness in "Rebel Without a Cause," though the kids in Falls City, going nowhere, have fewer hopes than those plaintive fifties teens. Brandon attracts the languid white-trash beauty Lana (Chloë Sevigny), a heavy-lidded and hungry girl hanging out with a couple of mangy ex-cons, the psychopathic John (Peter Sarsgaard), who loves Lana, and John's weak-minded satellite, Tom (Brendan Sexton III). Peirce gets the tentativeness of the first meetings beautifully—the dance of hesitation and withdrawal, the taunts and embarrassment, and then the release into pleasure as the kids suddenly take off in a car, with Brandon driving and the vicious John whispering in her ear. Soon they are out on the highway, drag-racing and then jumping off the road as the cops give chase. When the car gets enveloped in a cloud of dust, Brandon floats ecstatically into a dream of escape.

I don't think the life of the small-town derelict poor has ever been brought off in movies quite as well as it is here—with so little condescension and so few illusions. Lana and her friends go to work drugged up, or drunk, and after work stay wasted at the house of Lana's boozing mom (Jeannetta Arnette), a fading good-time girl who takes in screwed-up people and hopes for the best. The scenes at the house, with violent, unstable



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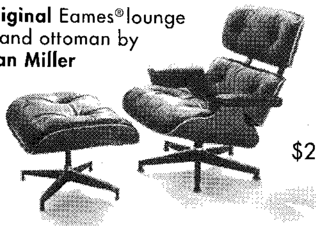

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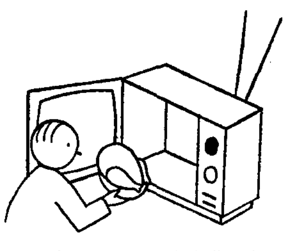
John serving as an infantile patriarch, amount to a kind of sorrowful burlesque of the American family. We see the companionability, the warmth, the inexpressible desire for wholeness but also the slatternly way of life which only feeds the disaster in the making. When Brandon makes love to Lana, undressing her on the ground outside a factory, she does it tenderly, ardently (the scene is truly erotic), and also with considerable furtiveness and guile, fooling Lana into thinking that she's a man. There's a comic element here—Sevigny, a good actress, makes Lana so ripely eager for love, and so easily pleasured, that she's like a character sprinkled with fairy dust in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." But the comedy is ambivalent and dangerous, tinged with erotic fervor and dread. Brandon goes too far to turn back.



Kimberly Peirce, working with the wonderful cinematographer Jim Denault, brings emotional vigor and directness to every scene; the camera is always where it needs to be to get the actors' most expressive moments, and when the violence comes it is savage and shocking but not hyped beyond the common nightmare of mayhem among familiars. The movie leaves realism now and then: the filmmakers give us the dark highway of Brandon's most romantic dreams and the lightning flashes that may represent her desire for the charge she's been missing. Her dreams do come true, and then they destroy her. The movie is like a long tragic poem: it ends in catastrophe, but passes through euphoria along the way, and something like nobility, too.

Edward Norton, a grievously alienated office worker, boards an airplane and winds up sitting next to Brad Pitt, a happy-go-lucky warrior, violent and charismatic, who vanquishes the inner nerd in other men. The two guys take a shine to each other; they turn each other on by denouncing the evils of corporate life and the tastefully bland designs of Ikea. Pitt becomes Norton's mentor, and they live together in an abandoned house in which everything is rotting—a protest, apparently, against the yuppie dream of catalogue-ordered perfection which they both detest. Since the two of them also enjoy brawling in the street, they decide to open, in a disgusting basement, a little organization they call "fight club," where men similarly disaffected beat each other to a pulp in bare-knuckle boxing, gouging, and head-bashing sessions that go on forever. After a while, fight clubs spring up all over the country, and an army of battered but proud men—they recognize one another by their bruises—operates at Brad Pitt's command, and begins setting off bombs and vandalizing stores. As you may have gathered, we're not meant to take "Fight Club" literally. Based on Chuck Palahniuk's novel (Jim Uhls did the adaptation), the movie is a kind of fantasia. I think of it as a fascist rhapsody posing as a metaphor of liberation, and I would deliver a long tirade against it if it weren't such a dog—such a laborious and foolish waste of time. So a short tirade will have to do.

The director, David Fincher, cannot be accused of mere commercial opportunism. In some half-crazed way, Fincher wants to be an artist. "Fight Club" has an atmosphere of sardonic disaffection, some of which is funny, and there are weird episodes filled with self-pummelling energy—for instance, a scene in which Norton punches himself out and then blackmails his boss with an assault charge. The camera is rambunctious and alive, the lighting viciously dark, and the fight-club scenes have a gnashing, pounding immediacy that is initially quite exciting as a kind

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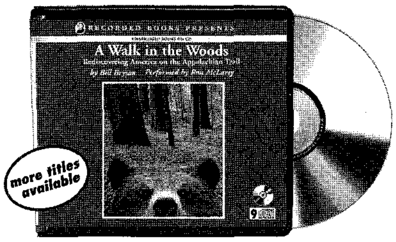
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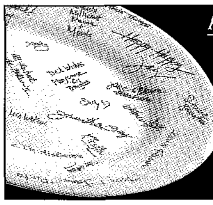

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of feral expression of despair. But the fights become hell to sit through. We're not meant to root for one man or another. We're meant to root for blood; that is, to appreciate the glory of bloodshed as a moral protest against the deadening perfection of corporate society. Since I make my own protest by swallowing a bucketful of sand at Jones Beach now and then, or, alternatively, by warbling a Mozart sonata to the lone jonquil at my windowsill, I cannot see the necessity for so many black eyes, broken noses, and purple bruises. There may be many ways of protesting against what Fincher claims he hates. In his hands, the florid anti-consumerist rant gets overtaken by the movie's unacknowledged sadomasochistic and homoerotic subtext. The dangers of Ikea get forgotten (and why pick on Ikea, anyway?), and what's left is the welted bliss of men who've received beatings from other men. Well, bully for them. Helena Bonham Carter, looking ravenous and pale, like a diminutive Expressionist vamp, turns up and fornicates like mad, but "Fight Club" is not a movie about boys and girls.

Fincher is both art-conscious and morally unconscious at the same time (which may be exactly the mentality needed to make a cult hit). As in "Seven," he creates an atmosphere of apocalyptic grunge. It's the kind of doominess that may work in music—in punk or in razor-gargled Teutonic rock—as a soul-satisfying wail. But in a long narrative, apocalyptic grunge has nowhere to go but into wilder and wilder scenes and sheer repetition. After flailing around forever, "Fight Club" ends with a fancy psychological explanation of everything we've seen, but the explanation has zero emotional effect. Then the terrorist bombs planted by Brad Pitt's army at the headquarters of various credit-card companies go off, and the corporate towers beautifully collapse. No fascist vision has ever been lovelier. "Fight Club" was produced by Twentieth Century Fox, and, at the risk of obviousness, I can't stop myself from wondering how the fellows over there on Sixth Avenue or out in Century City would react to a deposit of liberationist bombs under their own buildings. Perhaps I underestimate them; perhaps they would appreciate the explosions as an aesthetic experience. ♦

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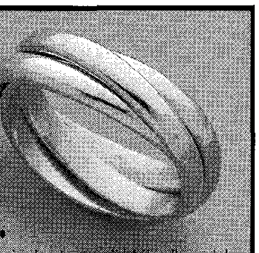

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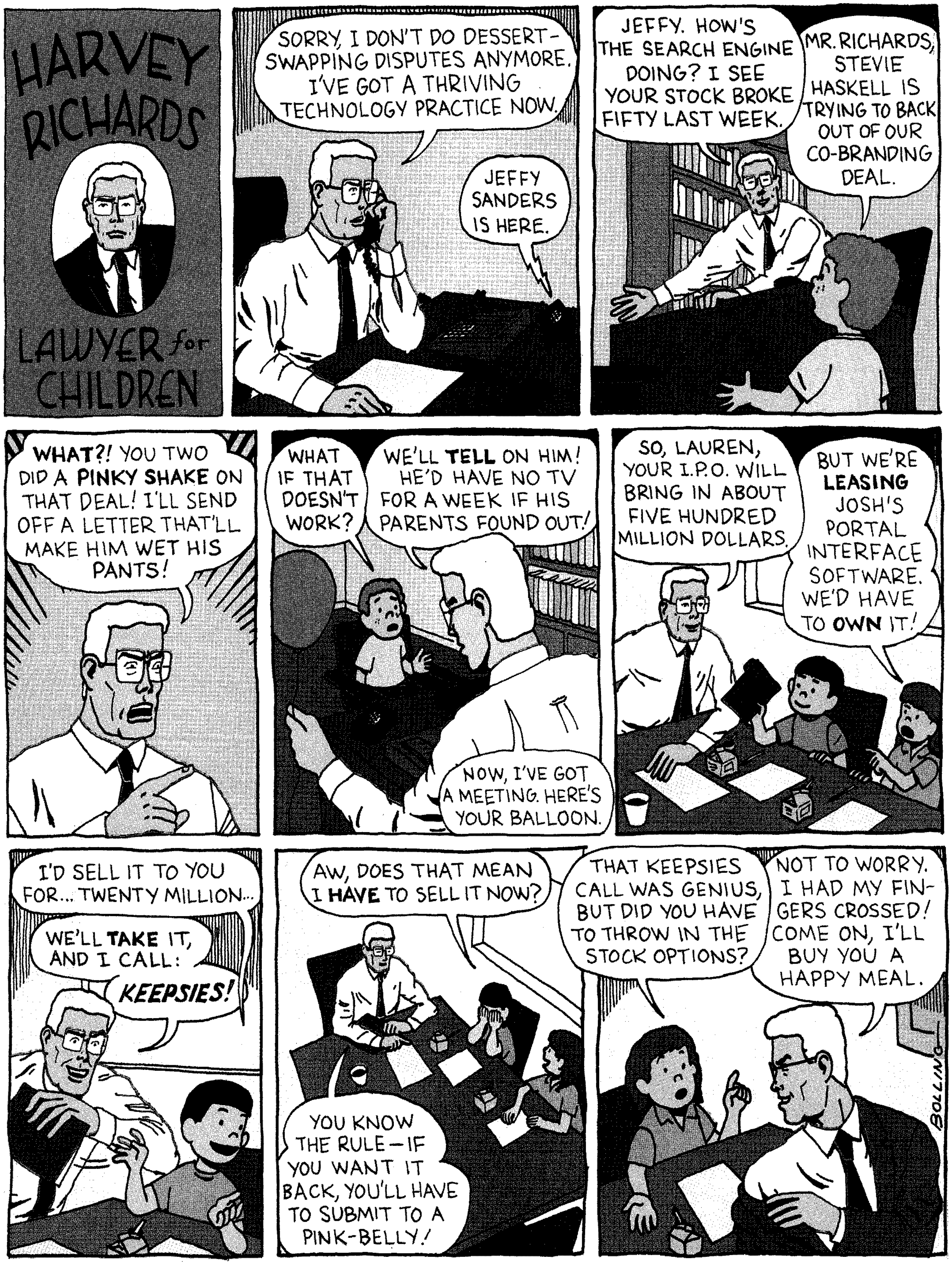
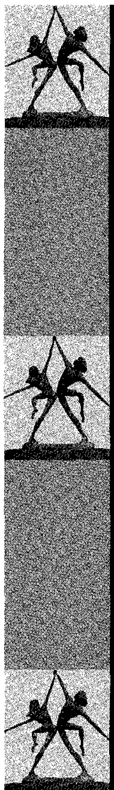
THE BACK PAGE BY RUBEN BOLLING


HARVEY RICHARDS
LAWYER for CHILDREN
SORRY, I DON'T DO DESSERT-SWAPPING DISPUTES ANYMORE. I'VE GOT A THRIVING TECHNOLOGY PRACTICE NOW.
JEFFY SANDERS IS HERE.
JEFFY. HOW'S THE SEARCH ENGINE DOING? I SEE YOUR STOCK BROKE FIFTY LAST WEEK.
MR. RICHARDS, STEVIE HASKELL IS TRYING TO BACK OUT OF OUR CO-BRANDING DEAL.
WHAT?! YOU TWO DID A PINKY SHAKE ON THAT DEAL! I'LL SEND OFF A LETTER THAT'LL MAKE HIM WET HIS PANTS!
WHAT IF THAT DOESN'T WORK?
WE'LL TELL ON HIM! HE'D HAVE NO TV FOR A WEEK IF HIS PARENTS FOUND OUT!
NOW, I'VE GOT A MEETING. HERE'S YOUR BALLOON.
SO, LAUREN, YOUR I.P.O. WILL BRING IN ABOUT FIVE HUNDRED MILLION DOLLARS.
BUT WE'RE LEASING JOSH'S PORTAL INTERFACE SOFTWARE. WE'D HAVE TO OWN IT!
I'D SELL IT TO YOU FOR... TWENTY MILLION...
WE'LL TAKE IT, AND I CALL:
KEEPSIES!
AW, DOES THAT MEAN I HAVE TO SELL IT NOW?
YOU KNOW THE RULE—IF YOU WANT IT BACK, YOU'LL HAVE TO SUBMIT TO A PINK-BELLY!
THAT KEEPSIES CALL WAS GENIUS, BUT DID YOU HAVE TO THROW IN THE STOCK OPTIONS?
NOT TO WORRY. I HAD MY FINGERS CROSSED! COME ON, I'LL BUY YOU A HAPPY MEAL.
BOLLING



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BUT HOW OFTEN IS IT
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